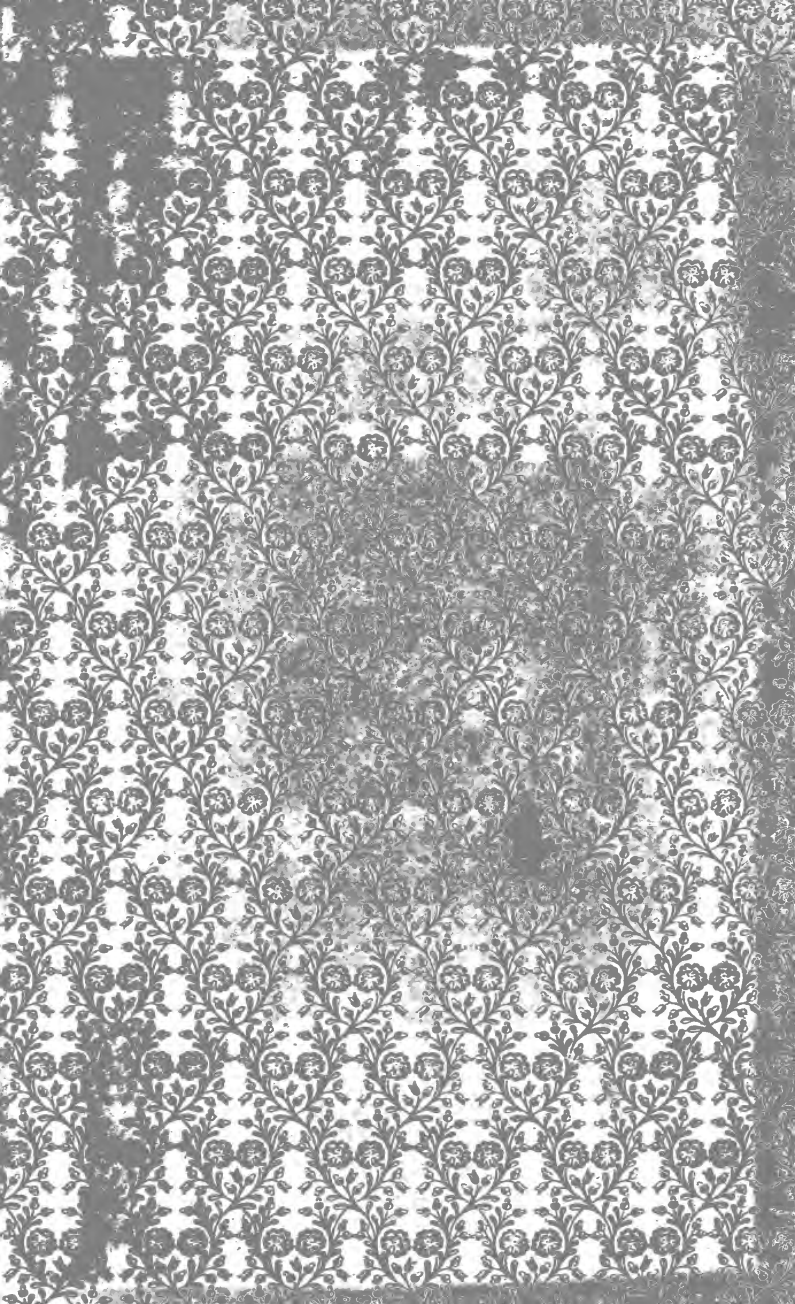


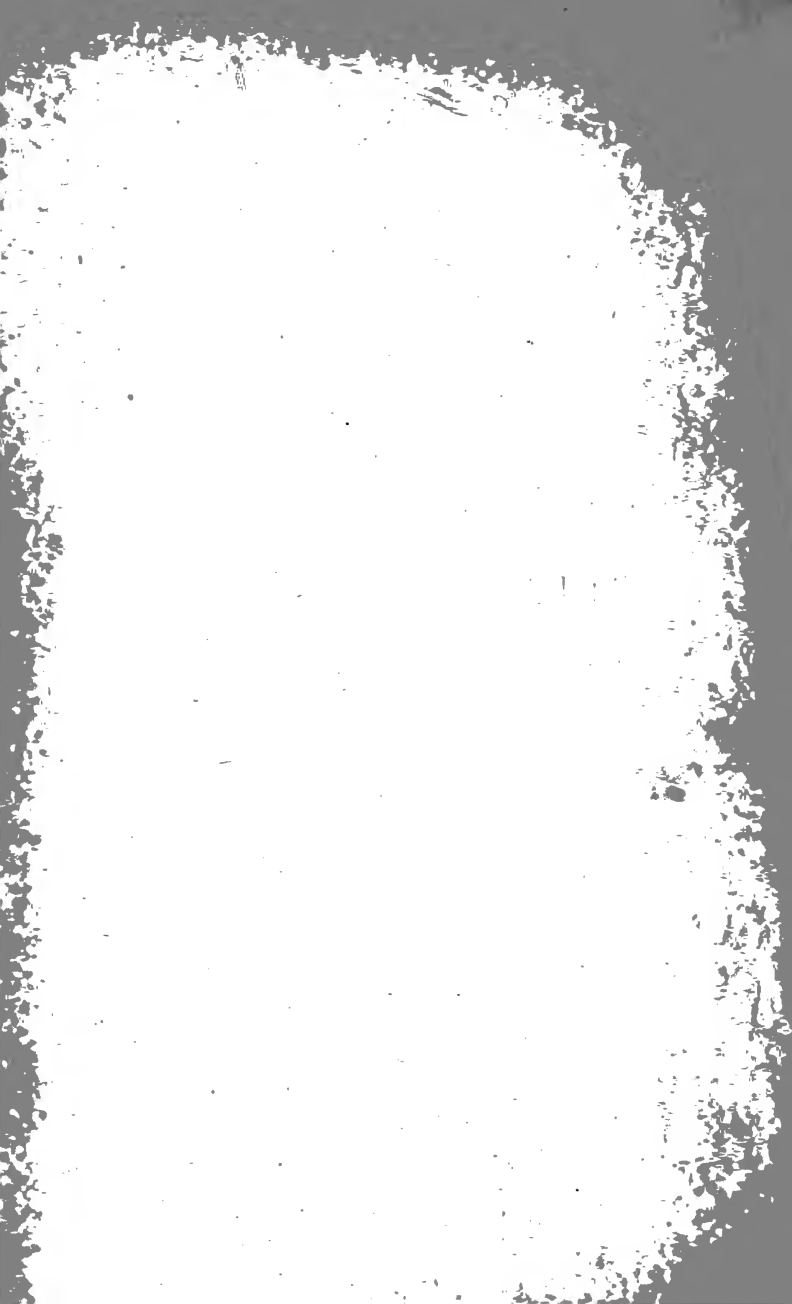
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THE CONVICT SHIP

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL

AUTHOR OF

'THE WRECK OF THE GROSVENOR' 'MY SHIPMATE LOUISE

'THE PHANTOM DEATH' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. II.

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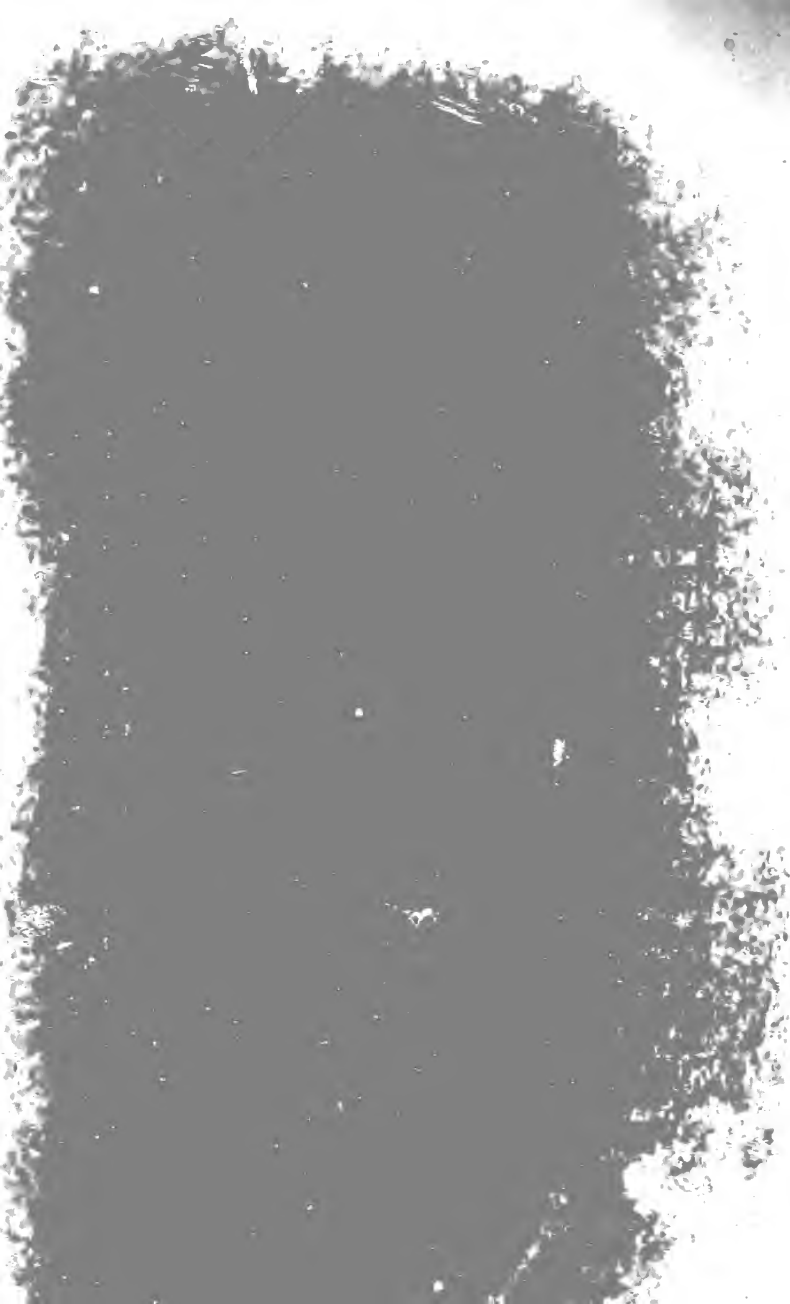
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CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME

CHAP.	PAGE
XVIII. SHE IS TAKEN BEFORE THE COMMANDER . . .	1
XIX. SHE IS QUESTIONED BY THE DOCTOR . . .	30
XX. SHE CONVERSES WITH HER COUSIN . . .	53
XXI. SHE ENTERS UPON HER DUTIES . . .	73
XXII. SHE SEES HER SWEETHEART . . .	92
XXIII. SHE VISITS THE BARRACKS . . .	108
XXIV. SHE ALARMS HER COUSIN . . .	128
XXV. SHE DELIVERS HER LETTER, AND SEES A CON- VICT PUNISHED . . .	144
XXVI. SHE ATTENDS CHURCH SERVICE AND WITNESSES A TRAGEDY . . .	159
XXVII. SHE LISTENS TO A CONVERSATION . . .	181
XXVIII. SHE OVERHEARS TWO SAILORS TALKING . . .	196
XXIX. SHE IS ALARMED BY WHAT IS SAID BY THE OFFICERS . . .	207
XXX. SHE CONVERSES WITH HER SWEETHEART . . .	221
XXXI. SHE DESCRIBES A STORM . . .	242
XXXII. SHE DESCRIBES THE SEIZURE OF THE SHIP BY THE CONVICTS . . .	256
XXXIII. SHE DESCRIBES THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE CONVICTS	287



THE CONVICT SHIP

CHAPTER XVIII

SHE IS TAKEN BEFORE THE COMMANDER

I WAS awakened from a deep slumber by the glare of a lantern upon my eyes, by the weight of a heavy hand upon my shoulder, and by a deep voice roaring out: 'Here y'are, then! Another convict, is it? Who's to say what's right aboard a craft where everything's wrong? Out you come, my lively!' And, still half asleep and blinded by the light and deafened by the fellow's roaring voice, I was dragged as though I had been a child out of the sail and held erect.

A second man holding a lantern raised it to my face and peered at me. I had seen both fellows in this place before; they were the boatswain and the sailmaker.

‘What are you a-doing down here?’ said the sailmaker.

The boatswain now let me go, and I stood upright before the two men, still dazed and horribly frightened, though my wits were slowly returning.

‘I’m doing no harm,’ said I, blinking at the light, which, as it was held close, put an insufferable pain into my eyes. ‘I hid myself. I want to get to Australia.’

‘Australia, is it?’ thundered the boatswain. ‘Why, you young rooter, d’ye know we ain’t bound to Australia? Where did ye come aboard?’

‘Woolwich.’

‘D’ye know this is a convict ship?’

‘Yes, I know it.’

‘Has he been a-broachin’ of anything?’ said the sailmaker, holding high the lantern and slowly sweeping its light round the interior.

‘What are ye?’ said the boatswain, whose voice was louder than that of any man I had ever heard or could dream of.

‘A runaway boy,’ said I. ‘Take me on deck. I’m sick for the want of light.’

‘Sails, d’ye hear him?’ said the boatswain. ‘By the great anchor, as my old mother used to say, but here’s one I allow as has squeezed through the hawse-pipe on his road to the quarter-deck, for, hang me, if he hain’t a-hordering of us already.’

‘What’s your trade, Jimmy?’ said the sailmaker, addressing me. ‘Nuxman or jigger, or are you a lobsneaker, hey? Self-lagged, by the Lord!’

‘Come along aft and see the capt’n,’ said the boatswain.

He then spoke to the sailmaker about the sails which they had apparently descended to view, and, catching me by the arm, walked me under the hatch, where he came to a stand.

‘Been here since Woolwich, ye say?’

‘Yes,’ I answered.

‘All in the dark?’

‘Yes.’

‘What have you eaten and drunken?’

‘I brought some food with me.’

‘Are you one of a gang?’ And here he rolled a pair of large glassy eyes over the casks and coils of rope. He was a very

powerful seaman, deeply bitten by small-pox and without a right ear.

‘I am alone,’ said I.

‘Up ye go!’ he cried, and he partly hoisted and partly tossed me through the hatch on to the upper deck.

It was broad day, though the interior of the forecastle into which I had emerged was gloomy. Beyond the forecastle-entrance the white and windy sunshine was coming and going to the frequent sweep of clouds athwart the sky. The brightness of that light thrilled my eyes with pain, and I turned my back upon it, putting my hand to my head for a few moments.

‘’Tisn’t everybody, mates, that goes to sea afore the mast as signs on,’ said the boat-swain, generally addressing a few sailors who had risen from their sea-chests or lounged out of the shadow forward to look at me.

‘If this here was a female convict ship, Mr. Balls,’ said one of the men, ‘you’d find that that there covey was after one of the gals.’

‘Let him wash hisself,’ said another sea-

man, speaking with his hands plunged deep in his pockets, 'and there'll be nothen likelier aboard us. Dummied if he don't remind me of my Mary Hann.'

'Let'm sit,' said another of the sailors. 'I've got a drop of grog in my chest. I started on my first voyage in the fore-peak and knows what head seas mean down there to a country stomach.'

'Sit and breathe,' said the boatswain, backing me to a chest. 'Fetch your sup along, Joe. He don't look much of a rascal, do he?' And I observed that he eyed me very closely and with looks of surprise and doubt which somewhat softened the fierceness of his one-eared, glassy-eyed face.

I was glad to sit. My strength had been fearfully overtaxed by confinement and by my mental sufferings and want of air. I was afraid I should faint and my sex be discovered. A pannikin with a dram of black rum in it was given to me. I smelt the fiery stuff and asked for water.

'Neat, my warrior, neat, and down with it!' cried the fellow who had given me the

rum. 'Water's for washin' in. Don't talk of rum and water. Soap and water, my heart ; that's it.'

'Give the lad water,' said the boatswain. 'Blowed if I'm going to take him aft drunk.' One of the fellows brought a pannikin of water and turned a small quantity into the rum. I looked up into his face and thanked him with a smile and drank.

'Ever at sea afore, Jacky?' said a sailor.

'D'ye hear the grit of old hoss in his squeak that you asks that?' said the deep-lunged boatswain.

'And to think,' said a surly-looking sailor, 'that the town-crier's still a-ringing for him and his grandmother still a-calling at every public-house to see if he ain't there!'

'What d'ye say to a rinse, bo', afore ye lays aft?' said the fellow who had offered me the rum. 'A clean face may stand the little chap in with the old man,' said he, addressing the boatswain.

'Have a clean-up, young 'un, afore I takes ye aft?' said Mr. Balls.

'Yes,' I answered.

The boatswain stepped out, and in a few moments returned with a tin dish of cold water and an old towel. 'Turn to now and polish away,' said he. 'Bear a hand. A clean face is like a clean shirt; it gives a man a chance.'

I dipped a corner of the towel into the water and rubbed my face, and when I had looked at the towel I judged I had wanted washing very badly indeed. By this time some fourteen or fifteen seamen had come about me; they lounged and stared, and commented freely in growling, very audible voices upon my appearance and new suit of pilot cloth. It was the forecastle dinner-hour, whence I concluded the time was something after twelve. Nearly all the ship's company were below, some seated on their chests, eating, a few in their hammocks, smoking, and looking at me over their swinging beds; some, who had drawn close, brought their dinners in their hands, a cube of beef or a hunch of pork on a biscuit, that served as a trencher; these fellows flourished sheath- or clasp-knives, and they chewed slowly, as men whose teeth

had long grown artful and wary in the business of biting on shipboard.

The interior was indeed a grim, gloomy, massive picture; the men were rudely and variously and some of them half savagely attired; the place was roofed with hammocks; tiers of bunks arched into the head where they vanished in the gloom. A lamp swung under a great beam, and its light was needed, despite the brightness of the day outside, and of the shaft of daylight that floated through the open scuttle forward and hung in the obscurity like a square of luminous mist, as a sunbeam streams through a chink of closed shutter. A number of stanchions supported the upper deck, and suits of oil-skins hung upon nails swayed against these wooden supports like hanged men as the ship bowed and lifted her head. The atmosphere was scarcely supportable with its mingled smells of strong tobacco and the fumes of the kids or tubs in which the greasy boiled meat had been brought in.

‘Aft with us now, youngster,’ said the boatswain, ‘and give an account of yourself.

And may the Lord ha' mercy on your soul! This here's a convict ship; there's nothen going under six dozen. Everything over that's a yardarm job.'

He grasped me by the arm and walked me out of the forecastle, but not, I thought, with the temper he had dragged me out of my hiding-place with. By this time my sight had strengthened, and, though the broad daylight outside brought the tears to my eyes, the pain passed in a moment or two.

I glanced at the deck of the ship, but should not have known the vessel as the *Childe Harold*. Strong barricades, studded with iron spikes, had been erected a little way abaft the foremast and upon the quarter-deck, leaving a narrow open space betwixt this after-fencing and the front of the cuddy. Each barricade had a gate. At the after-gate stood a red-coated sentry, with a loaded musket and fixed bayonet. At the great central or main hatch stood another sentry. In the recess formed by the overhanging lap of the poop-deck was a stand of arms. The barricades made a huge pen of the waist, main-deck, and part of the

quarter-deck. On the left or port side ran a strong barrier, like a great fence, leaving a narrow gangway betwixt it and the bulwark. This I afterwards understood was to enable the sailors and others to go backward and forward without constantly obliging them to pass the sentries and enter the space barricaded off for the convicts.

I glanced behind me as I walked with the boatswain, and saw a sentry stationed at the forecastle, and two more, each with muskets and fixed bayonets, paced the break of the poop athwartships to and fro in a regular, pendulum, sentinel swing, which brought them crossing each other always in exactly the same place. I had young, very keen eyes. All these points I had collected before we had gone half the length of the main-deck gangway. Not a convict was to be seen. I had caught a sight of two men walking together on the poop right aft, near the wheel, and I also saw Will on the poop standing to leeward beside another young apprentice; and on the other side of the deck, at the head of the poop ladder, was the officer of the watch.

As I advanced with the boatswain I saw Will look, make a step toward the brass rail which protected the fore-end of the raised deck and stare a moment ; he then wheeled round, walked to the side and gazed at the white wash of passing water. The ship was under a great spread of canvas, heeling over and sailing fast, and the yeasty swirl alongside was swift and dazzling. I could not see the horizon over the weather bulwarks ; but to leeward it was all open sea, green, ridging and flecked, with a cold blue sky over the trucks and many large white clouds sailing down into the west. Two or three women, with shawls over their heads, sat on the edge of a little square hatch under the break of the poop ; some children were running about near them. These women stared very hard at me as I passed.

‘Hullo, bo’sun !’ called out the man who was standing at the head of the poop-ladder. ‘What have you got there ?’

‘A stowaway, sir.’

‘When did you find him ?’

‘Just now, sir.’

‘Where?’

‘Under the forecastle.’

‘Step him up here.’

The boatswain made me ascend the poop-ladder, himself following. This was a deck well remembered by me; I had spent a long hour upon it with Tom and Will when we visited the ship in the docks. All was unchanged here; the boats swung in their davits; the sweep of deck went white as a freshly peeled almond to the grating abaft the wheel; the skylights sparkled and the bright brass binnacle-hoods mirrored the sun in crimson stars. On high the full-breasted canvas rose in space after space of milky softness with a stately swaying of the button of the truck, as the ship leaned to the sea and lifted to windward again.

The person who had ordered the boatswain to bring me on to the poop was, as I afterward got to know, the second mate, Mr. Thomas Masters, a full-faced man, short and strong, his nostrils tinged with purple, no visible throat, and a strange, leering smile upon his mouth when he looked or spoke.

Will left the poop by the other ladder ; his fellow-apprentice leaned against the lee rail staring at me. The second mate turned his face in the direction of the two men whom I had observed walking aft abreast of the wheel.

One of these two cried out : ‘ Who’s that, Mr. Masters ? ’

‘ A stowaway, sir,’ answered the second mate.

Both persons approached. As they advanced along the deck, a third man came up out of the cuddy or saloon through the companion, and joined them. The three stepped up to me. One was Joseph Sutherland, the captain of the vessel, a lean man with a slight stoop, about forty years of age. His face was thin ; the skin had a look of leather from long exposure to weather ; his eyes were a weak blue with a tear in each corner, which kept him mopping with a pocket-handkerchief. Yet I liked the expression of his face ; there was the heart of a man in it.

The second person was Surgeon Russell-Ellice, R.N., the doctor who had supreme charge of the convicts. This man was with-

out any hair on his face ; and the hair on his head was cropped as close as mine was or a convict's. He had large, soft brown eyes and a brown skin, blue on the cheeks and lip, where he shaved. His mouth was firm, with an expression that seemed to lie between scornfulness and self-complacency. He had a manner of thrusting out his chest and backing his head when he spoke, and of so holding himself when he stood or walked as to stretch the inches of his stature to their limits.

The third person was Captain James Barrett, of the —th Regiment of Foot. He was the captain in charge of the guard. He was of the average type of British officers ; smart, well-dressed, good-looking, with a glass which he put into his eye to examine me.

I ran my gaze over the faces of these three, not then knowing who they were, though I guessed by their air that they were chiefs in the ship. I did not feel afraid ; my end had been triumphantly accomplished. I needed but look over the rail on either hand to know that we were out upon the wide ocean, that, though England indeed could not

be very far astern, yet the land was as far away for my purpose as if it had been a thousand leagues distant. And then there was the consideration of my sex to give me nerve; these people were gentlemen. I had but to declare myself to make sure of tender usage. But though I did not mean to do this, and prayed heartily that no occasion might arise to force me into it, yet the sense of it was a refuge that wonderfully supported my spirits, the more particularly now that I had observed there were women on board and quarters where, should the worst come to the worst, I could live with my own sex.

The captain and the doctor (as I shall henceforth call Surgeon Russell-Ellice for the sake of brevity) eyed me all over for some moments without questioning me—the captain with looks of surprise and wonder that came very nearly to commiseration, the other with frowns and suspicion like fire in his gaze.

‘What are you doing on board my ship?’ said Captain Sutherland.

‘I wish to get to Australia, sir,’ said I

*Then who
not drop
the Rescue*

‘What! Without paying? Do you know that this is a convict ship?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘I could have him brought to the gang-way for this,’ said the doctor. ‘Has he been searched, bo’sun?’

‘No, sir.’

The doctor stamped his foot. ‘Search him!’ he cried.

Captain Sutherland looked on as though he recognised a superior in the doctor. At this moment Will came up to the lee ladder and leaned beside the other apprentice, listening and watching. The boatswain threw open my pea-jacket and drove his huge hands into my pockets. I was thankful not to feel the blood in my cheeks; had this piece of rude handling reddened my face the doctor would have found me out. His soft but scrutinising eyes were upon me.

‘He’s a plump young man,’ exclaimed Captain Barrett, in an aside to the commander of the ship. ‘What’s in your hold to make him fat?’

The boatswain drew out my handkerchief,

the two new clay pipes I had put in my pocket that I might seem a man when the crowning occasion arose, and the tinder-box and matches. Happily I had left the little parcel of candles in the sails. The boatswain dived his immense tarry fingers into the pockets of my waistcoat and found nothing.

Whilst I was being searched I observed that one of the sentries who marched athwart the poop was the man who had looked over the rail when I was in the boat alongside off Woolwich. I met his glance and saw he did not remember me. I never once turned my eyes in the direction of Will.

‘Is that all?’ said Dr. Russell-Ellice.

‘That’s all, sir,’ replied the boatswain, replacing my cap on my head, after feeling the lining.

‘Where do you say this lad was found?’

‘Just for’ards of the bulkhead under the fo’c’sle.’

‘It’s a store-room,’ said Captain Sutherland.

‘Has it been searched?’ exclaimed the doctor.

‘I dunno what ye mean by searched,’ answered the boatswain sullenly, resenting as a merchant seaman the imperious manner of the Royal Naval surgeon.

‘Captain,’ cried the doctor. ‘You know what I mean ; explain to this man.’

‘Have you overhauled the store-room, Balls, for others of this fellow’s pattern?’ said the captain.

‘No, sir.’

‘Then go with the sergeant of the guard,’ said the doctor ; ‘examine every nook and corner, and make your report.’

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ answered the boatswain very sulkily again, and swinging round on his heels he quitted the poop with a sullen walk eloquent of malediction. The doctor drew back as if he would admit it was now the commander’s right to ask questions. Captain Barrett gazed at me strenuously through his eye-glass. His intent regard made me feel very uneasy.

‘What’s your name?’ said Captain Sutherland.

‘Simon Marlowe, sir.’

‘What are you?’ I hung my head. ‘No

need,' he exclaimed, 'to ask if you were ever at sea ; your hands are like a woman's.'

'He's a deuced good-looking chap, doctor,' said Captain Barrett in another aside. 'Plump as a partridge, by the great horn spoon! What runs a chap to fat down in your hold, captain?'

'What have you come to sea for?' said the captain, speaking with a severity whose forced note my ear could not miss. Indeed, he seemed to find a sort of pleasure in looking at me.

'I want to get to some friends in Tasmania, sir,' I answered.

'What names?'

I was ready for him ; for weeks I had been rehearsing too diligently the part I was now playing not to be ready. 'Satchell, sir.'

'Where do they live?'

'At Hobart Town.'

'What's their address, boy?'

'I don't know, sir. I'll find out when I arrive.'

The doctor grinned gravely.

'“ Arrive ! ”' cried the captain. 'How do

you know I'll allow you to arrive, as you call it? "Arrive," you monkey! You've committed a felony; you've broken into private premises; for all I can tell, you may have broached the cargo of the ship. There are men in that prison down there,' said he, pointing to the main hatch, 'who are being transported for life for smaller crimes.'

'I'm sorry, sir. I would do nothing wrong. I will gladly pay for my passage with my labour if you will give me work—such work as I can do.'

The doctor put his hand on the commander's arm and whispered in his ear. Captain Barrett exclaimed: 'If you're satisfied with the lad's account of himself, Captain Sutherland, he shall wait upon me, if you like.'

'What work have you for two servants?' exclaimed the doctor.

'I like his pluck, d' ye know,' answered Captain Barrett, 'and just now he happens to be rather friendless, Ellice.'

The doctor looked annoyed and walked to the rail.

‘Where do you come from?’ asked the commander.

‘London, sir.’

‘Who are your people?’ Again I hung my head.

‘He is in the right to look ashamed,’ said the doctor. ‘Take it that he has brought great grief and distress upon a respectable family by his mysterious disappearance. I don’t believe for a moment,’ continued he, eyeing me sternly, ‘that he has friends at Hobart Town. It’s just an ordinary runaway case. He may have robbed some kind employer—perhaps defrauded his own father. His clothes are new and good. Where did you get the money to buy these clothes with?’ he asked. I kept my head hung. ‘Lads of your sort,’ he continued, ‘get hold of cheap romancing works—vile, lying fictions—books which represent Jack Sheppard as a greater man than Wellington. Little by little they advance till they end there,’ said he, pointing, as Captain Sutherland had, to the main hatch. ‘Down there, weighted with irons, branded as criminals, leaving their

native country for ever, expelled by the just laws of an outraged community, are many men who have begun as you have begun—nay, who may have started on their downward career with a great deal more of modesty than you have exhibited.’

Captain Barrett let his eye-glass fall, whistled softly and lounged aft to the wheel.

All this while the decks had remained comparatively deserted. Just at this moment a boatswain’s mate tuned up his whistle, and a number of seamen came out of the fore-castle and went to work in various parts of the ship forward. The doctor continued to lecture me; but I was looking at the strange, grim scene of decks and did not heed him. You would have thought, at sight of the barricades, that the ship was full of wild beasts; that man-eating and ravening creatures took the air in the space inclosed by the savage, iron-studded, bristling fence work.

Suddenly, the sentry at the main hatch stiffened his figure, as though to a sudden call to attention. He guarded a door at the ex-

tremity of a short wooden passage, broad enough to allow one person to pass through at a time. A man clothed as a convict stepped through this door. On perceiving him the doctor broke off, and went to the brass poop rail and overhung it, gazing eagerly. A second and a third convict appeared, then a fourth; this man held a fiddle in one hand and a bow in the other.

And now I heard a sound of heavy clanking footfalls, as though a long end of chain cable was being dragged along the deck, and one after another, to the number of perhaps seventy or eighty, issued the convicts, every man, saving the first four, wearing iron rings and chains upon his ankles, the chains triced up to the waist. They were clothed in the same garb I had observed on board the *Warrior*; a dingy sort of gray striped with red and a kind of Scotch cap. The convicts who had led the way cried out sharply: they delivered their orders fast and fierce, like a drill-sergeant savage with yokel recruits. The fellows ranked themselves into a line with something of the discipline of soldiers; then

the fellow who held the fiddle put it into his neck and began to screw out a march.

‘Attention! Left turn!’ shouted one of the unshackled convicts. ‘Quick march!’

The fiddle played, and away stepped the line of men, all keeping time to the music, faltering but a little to the movement of the ship, and their irons clanked and their chains rattled as they tramped.

I lost all sense of my situation when I saw those convicts. I made a step to the side of the doctor, and my eyes seemed on fire as I gazed. Tom was not one of them. I guessed that this was a gang brought up to exercise and take the air according to the notions of Doctor Russell-Ellice. It sickened my heart, but it made my spirit mad to witness those wretches marching round and round within the wild-beast-like enclosure, to listen to the mocking squeak of the fiddle threading the dull metallic tramp of the ironed felons, to feel that Tom was one of them and amongst them below, ironed as they were, apparelled and disciplined as they were, guarded by

soldiers with loaded muskets—himself as innocent as I, as the dark-eyed doctor beside me, as the commander of the ship, who appeared to have forgotten me in watching this strange march of felons clanking round and round to the tune of the fiddle.

‘That’s my idea,’ said the doctor to the captain. ‘That’s the way to keep them in health. You may judge by their manner of marching that they enjoy the music.’

The captain looked at his second mate and smiled sarcastically. Another person had by this time arrived on the poop; he, like Captain Barrett, was attired in undress uniform. I afterward learned that he was Lieutenant Chimmo, one of the two officers in charge of the guard. They approached and looked hard at me—so hard that I imagined Captain Barrett had divined my sex. Their observation won the attention of Captain Sutherland, by whom I had been unheeded whilst he watched the convicts. He said: ‘Get you down there to leeward and wait till you’re wanted.’ He spoke sternly,

but almost in the same breath of his speech his face relaxed, and he exclaimed : ‘ Are you famished ! ’

‘ No, sir.’

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, as though vexed that the captain should pity me.

‘ Get you down to leeward,’ repeated the commander ; and I went and stood at the rail.

Will was aloft in the mizzen-top and the other apprentice in the ratlines of the mizzen shrouds at work there. I looked up at Will, who kissed his hand. The act was boyish and indiscreet, and I averted my face, for I did not then know he was not to be seen from the other side of the poop.

The clear wind was sweet and refreshing after my many hours of confinement. I glanced over the side and watched the feather-white swirl of cloudy foam ; the yeast burst in a rainbow splendour from the bow and raced astern in ridges of snow, and I saw the spreading wake of the flying ship dancing miles distant in the airy green that ran in a

twinkling horizon round the sky. Far ahead slanted a sail, and far abeam to leeward was a dash of dusky-red canvas, whence I concluded that the coast was not very remote.

The tramping convicts marched round and round in single file to the tune of the fiddle. Some of them were little more than boys, eighteen or twenty years of age, and one or two of them were gray-haired men. Their dress was so levelling, and it seemed besides to stamp so strong an impression of rascality upon their faces, that one could not look at the ironed gang without supposing them all rogues and criminals of the worst sort. And yet I'd fancy, as they came facing aft toward the poop, I could see some countenances which would have passed in the streets and in company for comely, honest faces. But the general type was very villainous; the brow low, overhanging, and scowling; the eye small, deep-set, and restless; the mouth coarse and heavy, and the jaw strong, thick, defined like a beast's.

My eye rested upon one man. I was certain I had seen him before. He was immensely

broad-shouldered, pitted with small-pox. His arms were too long for his body, and the thickness of them and the fists were a giant's. His eyebrows were black ; his eyes a deep and fiery black ; his nose coarse, spread, flat and heavy at the nostrils. He had the look of a Jew, and after I had watched him a little while, I said to myself : ' Yes, now I remember. He is Barney Abram, the prize-fighter, who was under sentence of transportation for life in Newgate when I visited Tom in that jail with Uncle Johnstone.'

I craved to see my sweetheart. I waited for the hideous fiddle to cease squeaking, and for the gang to go below and a second gang to take its place, hoping that Tom might be one in this second gang. I say I waited. Rather, I stood hoping. Why they kept me waiting down to leeward on that poop I could not imagine. I guessed it would shock me horribly to see Tom with irons on, marching in convict's attire, a mere machine at the will of warders, themselves convicts ; yet did I passionately wish to see him that I might make sure he was on board, for though I

never dreamt that Will had mistook, still I yearned to satisfy myself with my own eyesight. But the gang continued to march round and round to the strains of the fiddle. Oh, the mockery of the blithe Irish tune the fellow played, timed by the metallic tramp of felons on the echoing deck !

CHAPTER XIX

SHE IS QUESTIONED BY THE DOCTOR

I WAS kept waiting, I knew not why, and used my leisure to gaze about me. I was without fear. I had scraped, with a stout heart, through the worst part, and cared little for what might follow. I had made up my mind to avow my sex if they should send me into the forecastle to live. I was very sure I should be unable to keep my secret amongst that body of rough, blaspheming, joking sailors. Nor should I be equal to the work of a seaman—I mean as an ordinary seaman or boy. It turned me dizzy to look aloft and think of climbing those towering heights.

Whilst I thus thought, I used my eyes and examined the ship. Opposite the main hatch, within the convicts' inclosure, stood a tall box, something like a sentry-box; over it a bucket was hung by an iron bar, and there

was a short length of rope attached to the bucket. I supposed the box was a sort of shower-bath for the prisoners. The main hatch was the only visible means of entering and leaving the prison quarters. It was extraordinarily protected, first, with heavy gratings with a manhole for the passage of one body, then by a strong railing of oak stanchions of a triangular shape, thickly studded with iron nails (the tops or heads of these stanchions I could just see as they sank like the vertical wires of a cage from the sides of the hatch down to the lower deck), then by a strong bulkheaded passage or corridor with a door at the end, as I mentioned when I spoke of the sentry stationed there. I saw two galleys. The forward one I guessed was for the ship's use, the after for the convicts; for in this galley I had observed a man in felon's dress. A huge longboat lay stowed in chocks athwartships just forward of the ship's galley.

Such details to me entered like the very spirit of prison life into the gleaming fabric of the ship, soiling, debasing, so flavouring her

that there was no magic in the pure freshness of the ocean wind to purge her into sweetness. Marvellous that human sin should subtly enter and find expression in timber and hemp and canvas, in bricks and mortar, in old hulks, in prison piles—it matters not what—subduing all suggestions to its own inspirations. I had noticed how the sordid influence and degrading quality of human wickedness had worked in dismantled hulks, making more hideous that which was already hideous with felon-carpentry; and now here was all beauty in this buoyant and bounding picture of a ship in full sail, leaning from the shining breeze, pouring into her wake the snow of the crested and dissolving surge, dimmed and defiled and saddened by her errand and cargo, by the aspect of her decks, and by the noise of men marching in irons.

All this while the doctor stood at the break of the poop with his hands upon the rail, watching the convicts exercising, and sometimes nodding in time when the fiddler changed his tune; the captain likewise watched the convicts from the head of the weather poop

ladder; the two officers patrolled the weather deck, and both of them constantly looked at me when their walk brought them with their faces forward; the second mate was near the wheel, and the two sentries, with shouldered muskets with shining bayonets, crossed and recrossed each other at a little distance from where I stood.

By-and-by the boatswain and a soldier with stripes upon his arms came along the narrow gangway from the forecastle. They arrived on the quarter-deck, and the soldier, looking up, saluted.

‘Step up, sergeant, and you, Mr. Bo’sun, if you please,’ said the doctor. ‘Well,’ said he, when they had mounted the ladder, ‘what have you found where the lad’s been hiding?’

I was prepared to hear that they had discovered my stock of provisions and the bottles of water, and possibly the parcel of wax candles. But I was not uneasy; I was ready with a story. The sergeant, speaking with an Irish accent, answered: ‘We have found nothing, sirr.’

‘Did you thoroughly overhaul the place, Mr. Balls?’ said the captain.

‘Ay, sir. We’ve likewise been down into the fore-peak. All’s right for’ards.’

I was astonished, for I had never doubted that they would light upon my tins of meat and the bottles. Whether they had honestly overlooked the nook in which the things were stowed or whether, having met with them, they had resolved to keep the stuff to secretly eat and enjoy, is a question I cannot answer. Suppose this, they’d say nothing about the bottles of water, lest one discovery should force them into owning the other.

‘Captain,’ exclaimed the doctor, ‘I shall want that lad locked up until I have satisfied myself as to his motive in hiding!’

‘I’m quite willing to lock him up,’ answered the captain, ‘but I’m an old hand, and I may tell you that there’s never much need to scratch deep to find out your stowaway’s reason.’

‘I’m not satisfied,’ said the doctor, turning his head and staring at me very sternly; ‘you’ll lock him up, if you please.’

‘Clap him in your jail; there’s a proper prison below,’ said the captain.

‘Certainly not!’ cried the doctor, with a toss of his head, seemingly insensible of the sarcasm of the captain’s suggestion. ‘He’s no convict, sir, he’s the ship’s prisoner.’

The sergeant eyed me very steadfastly. He suddenly saluted the doctor, and exclaimed: ‘May I ’list him, sir?’

‘Try him,’ said the captain, dryly. ‘It’s a sure sign a young chap wants to ’list when he hides in the fore-peak of an outward-bounder.’

‘Leave that matter, sergeant. Captain, you will be so good as to lock up that boy,’ said the doctor.

On this the captain told the boatswain to send the steward to him. A man with prominent, purple-tipped cheek-bones and blue eyes, very narrow shoulders and legs arching out to a degree I had never before beheld, wearing a blue jacket decorated with rows of buttons, came out of the cuddy. The captain called him on to the poop.

‘That lad’s a stowaway,’ said the captain,

pointing to me. The man looked. 'By order of the surgeon-superintendent he's to be locked up. Where? In the fore-castle? In the soldiers' quarters? You have spare cabins in the steerage?'

The man answered: 'Three.'

'Very well,' the captain said. 'Take him below and lock him up.'

'You're his jailor,' said the doctor, 'and I hold you responsible for his safe keeping.' The steward looked uneasy and astonished, and cast a glance at the marching file of convicts.

'Here,' said the captain. The steward approached him close. Something was said. The steward then came to me and exclaimed: 'Come along, young man!' I followed him down the steps on to the quarter-deck. At this instant the fiddle ceased, the echoing tramp of the felons was hushed, the convict-warders as before cried out sharply and fiercely.

'This way,' said the steward; and I walked after him through the cuddy door. Here was a bright, cheerful interior. The *Childe*

Harold was a passenger ship, and her accommodation aft was rich and fine. She was a convict ship now, but they had made no change. The bulkheads, ceiling, and trunk of the mizzen-mast were beautiful with gilt carving and paintings; narrow lengths of brilliant mirrors flashed back the light that streamed through the skylights; the chairs and lounges were choicely upholstered. Whilst I gazed, my imagination figured the grimy, barricaded, sentinelled, 'tweendecks prison in which Tom was to live. I caught sight of myself in a looking-glass. I had omitted to pull off my cap when I entered the cuddy—an oversight that might have convicted me to a keen eye. I scarcely knew myself in the glass. Spite of the rub I had given my face in the forecastle, I was still dark with the dirt of the store-room. It was as good as a mask. No one would have suspected the delicate skin of a woman under the grime on my cheek.

‘This way!’ said the steward.

He led me down some steps that fell from a small square of hatch close against the

inside of the cuddy front. It was gloomy down here. A corridor ran fore and aft, and on either hand were two or three cabins. The steward put his hand upon the door of the first of these cabins.

‘Step in,’ said he. ‘Is this your first appearance in quod, youngster?’

I did not understand him. He leaned against a bunk, thrust his hand into his trousers’ pockets, and looked me over. ‘What’s brought you into this day’s mess?’ said he. ‘Wasn’t you ’appy at home?’

I resolved to answer the man civilly, trusting he would befriend me.

‘I have friends in Tasmania, and wish to join them. I’m willing to work for nothing if you’ll give me work I can do. I’m not strong, sir.’

He asked me where I had come aboard, if I had known before hiding that this was a convict ship, where I had hidden, and how I had managed for food. ‘You’re a young gent,’ said he; ‘that’s clear. Them ’ands have never done dirtier work than quill-driving in some office, I’ll swear. Hope for

your soul's sake you haven't run away for wrong-doing, and that there's no kind 'arts at home a-haching for you.'

I declared in the most solemn and impassioned tones that I had not run away for wrong-doing, and that I had hidden in this ship for no other motive than to reach Tasmania. He inquired my name, and said: 'Well, I don't mind saying I like your looks. I believe you're honest and there's no 'arm in you. What does that there doctor mean by turning me into a jailor? I'm head steward. That's what I shipped for. He gets his living by looking after criminals at sea; and them as ain't criminals, according to him, must be tarned into tarnkeys, is it? He be blowed! Ye've had a tidy spell down for'ards. Since Woolwich, hey? Well, the capt'n told me to give ye a mouthful of grub, and that looks well. I'll turn the key upon ye, because it's the capt'n's orders. But as for that there doctor—he be blowed!'

He went out, leaving me easy, I may say almost happy, so different had been the usage I had received from what I had expected;

though, to be sure, the doctor had yet to settle accounts with me. But what could he do? If he kept me locked up, I was still in the ship that was carrying Tom across the seas. If he threatened me with the gangway, there was my sex. I might know—nay, I would swear, myself a sailor's daughter—that there was never a seaman on board that ship who would allow a hand to be lifted against a girl.

I took a view of the little cabin I was in. It was a steerage-berth, designed for the use of second-class passengers. Two mahogany bunks were affixed to the ship's wall under the circular porthole. In a corner near the door was a convenient arrangement of drawers and wash-stand and a flap, which, on lifting, I found to be a looking-glass. I went to the bunks to look through the porthole at the sea, and beheld in the upper bunk, on the bare boards, a large parcel. I could scarcely credit my sight. It was, in truth, the parcel of wearing apparel I had made up when I put on my boy's clothes and addressed to the care of the captain of this ship and left

in my Woolwich lodging, on the bare chances of my landlady sending it to the vessel! I say it was truly extraordinary that those clothes should be lying in the very cabin in which I was now lodged.

Whilst I stood looking at the parcel and musing upon the associations it recalled, and speculating upon the ideas the landlady had formed of me, the key was turned and the steward entered.

‘Here’s some lush and a mouthful of grub for you,’ said he. ‘It isn’t every stow-away who’s waited on by a head-steward, I can tell you. But it’s the cap’n’s orders, and luck comes with looks in this blushen universe.’

He placed a mug of red wine and a plate plentifully heaped up with cold boiled beef and ship-baked bread upon the wash-stand and again left me, turning the key. I ate heartily, and the wine did me good. I should have been mightily thankful for soap and water, but had not dared ask the steward for such luxuries. I walked about the cabin and looked through the portholes, and killed

the time by thinking. I was used to being alone, and after the darkness forward, with the furious motion of the ship's bows and the noises in the hold and the thunder of seas smitten by the thrust of the cutwater, this lighted cabin was heaven with its tranquillity and gentle motion of deck. I thought of Tom, and struggled to realise his prison quarters. Gloomy I knew they must be, heavily grated and shrouded by its sentinelled doorway as the main hatch was ; gloomy and evil-smelling, repulsive and inhuman, with spiked barricades and a prison and hospital. But I could not witness the picture in imagination. How and where did the prisoners sleep ? How and where did they eat ? And what was their fare ?

And what would my uncle and aunt think if they knew where I was ? I imagined them opening that door there and looking in and seeing me dressed as a boy and leaning on the edge of the bunk. So far my love had marched to a conquering tune. And it was not only that I had overcome several wonderful difficulties for a young woman to en-

counter single-handed ; it was not only that I was in the same ship with my sweetheart, bound to a land where we should be together, where in God's good time and with patience we might come to dwell together as husband and wife, happy in our love, happy under new skies, happy in our eternal severance from the odious and inhuman associations of our native country ; I, too, should have suffered with Tom, and taken my share of his misery, if not of his humiliation and degradation. This was a sweet and noble supporting thought. It was the one triumph of my love which gladdened me most to think of.

After I had been locked up two or three hours, and whilst the sun was still strong over the west, filling all that part with a moist scarlet light, the key was violently turned and Doctor Ellice walked in. My blood was fired by his insolent entrance, as though he were a warder with a right to break in upon a prisoner at any instant ; but I swiftly cooled when I recollected that he did not know I was a woman. In truth, for the moment I had forgotten my masquerade.

And, indeed, there is nothing so hard to sham as the airs and behaviour of the other sex. A woman may look a young man to perfection, as, indeed, I did ; but her female tricks and instincts will be breaking through if vigilance sleep an instant. You will find this so by observing even the most accomplished actress in male parts.

‘I have come to talk to you,’ said the doctor, very sternly. ‘I don’t understand your presence in this ship. Your explanations to the captain and to myself are not sufficient, and are unsatisfactory so far as they go.’ And then he began to question me. Who was I? What was my age? Would I swear that I was going to Tasmania to seek some relations? Would I swear that my name was Simon Marlowe? By this time my blood was on fire again, and, weakened as I was by what I had passed through, I might guess the old flashing lights were in my eyes as I looked at him.

‘I’ll tell you this much about myself,’ said I, stepping up to him and swelling my breast and tossing my head after my fashion when I

was in a rage: 'my father was a sailor, and I know enough of the sea to inform you that the master is the only head and authority which the people on board need recognise. You are not the master of this vessel. What right have you to come here and talk to me as you do, and to insult me as you lately did in the hearing of others, with your doubts as to my honesty and my motives for leaving home and the rest of it?'

He gazed at me in silence with the utmost astonishment. Indeed, he looked crestfallen. His lips lay apart in a sort of yawn of wonder, but he quickly recollected himself, as you will suppose of a man who, as I afterward learned, had made several voyages in charge of convicts, and was used to felons. His face darkened with temper, but his self-mastery was fine, and there was no passion in his tones.

'You do not understand. You are insolent and ignorant, though you are educated and refined, and altogether superior to the situation in which you have placed yourself. On this I base my suspicion and I must have the truth. I am supreme in this ship. The captain obeys

my orders. This is a Government ship, and you are subject to my discipline.'

He then began to question me afresh very deliberately. But I observed that he no longer insisted upon my swearing that my name was Simon Marlowe and so on; and indeed it was wonderful that so sensible a man should ask questions which only a fool would put; for, let me have answered him as I might, would he have believed me? I struggled with my temper and replied to him; now and again I would not answer, and he passed on. Once he threatened to bring me to the gangway, by which he meant that he would order me to be flogged; I folded my arms when he said that and looked him in the eyes.

He continued to question me very sternly nevertheless; demanded full particulars of my coming on board; asking whether I had travelled directly from my home wherever it might be, or loitered at Woolwich before hiding in the vessel. I told him I had stayed a short time at Woolwich.

'Are you acquainted with any one of the convicts on board this ship?' he exclaimed,

bursting out with this question abruptly, as though to catch me unawares.

My eyes sought the deck. I went to the bunk and looked through the porthole, turning my back to him.

‘Answer me,’ he cried.

I slowly confronted him and said: ‘Yes, I know one of the convicts.’

‘Which is the man?’

‘Barney Abram.’

He stared in good earnest, made a step the better to see me, my back being to the porthole, and said: ‘You know Barney Abram? Probably one of the worst characters in this ship. You are a friend of his?’

‘I did not use the word friend, sir. I know Barney Abram by sight. I recognised him as he paced the deck this afternoon.’

‘Where have you met him on shore?’

‘He was pointed out to me.’

‘Where—where?’

I paused to let him know I was not to be frightened by his imperious manner, and answered: ‘In Newgate Prison.’

‘Were you a prisoner?’ he asked quickly.

‘I was a visitor.’

‘Whom visiting?’

‘The jail.’

‘Who pointed the man out to you?’

‘My companion.’

‘Who was your companion?’

‘I’ll not answer that question,’ I replied, ‘because if I tell you who that companion was, I shall be acquainting you with more than I intend you shall know. But neither will I tell you any lies.’

He looked hard at my hands. I held them up close to his face and exclaimed: ‘Judge for yourself, sir. I have been no prisoner!’ and laughed.

‘You are the most impudent young dog I ever met,’ said he, with a sort of admiration in the anger of his looks. ‘Where were you educated?’

‘I never went to school; I was educated at home,’ I answered, feigning an air of shyness and swinging my leg.

‘Is your mother living?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Father?’

‘I have a stepfather,’ I answered.

‘And his is the home you have run away from, I suppose.’ He mused for a few moments and then said: ‘Put on your cap, and follow me.’

He led me through the saloon on to the main deck, and so through the gate in the after barricade where the sentry stood. I followed him without alarm, though I wondered with all my might why he should bring me into this convicts’ inclosure. Did he mean to send me below to live among the felons, or to be locked up in their bulkheaded prison? Not very likely. But what did he mean to do?

There was not a convict to be seen within the barricades. The sunset was rich and thunderous, and the air full of red light; the wind had freshened and blew very cold. The watch on deck were shortening sail, and the three royals and the mizzen top-gallantsail and some fore and aft canvas were slatting and jumping overhead, with a few seamen hoarsely bawling at the clew-lines, and some hands sprawling aloft. The first mate was

now in charge, and he stood on the poop looking up, watching the fellows climbing. This man I had seen aboard the ship in the East India Docks. Tom knew him and had shaken hands with him. The captain was walking with the two military officers, the sentries crossed and recrossed the poop-break, and round about the little booby-hatch, close against the cuddy front, were two or three soldiers and a few women and children.

‘Pass the word for Barney Abram,’ said the doctor to the sentry at the door of the main hatch.

The soldier did so, and after a minute or two the prize-fighter, with irons on his legs and a chain triced up to his waist, came through the door, attended by a convict warder, or ‘captain.’ He was a fierce and brutal-looking creature when you saw him close. His face was pitted with small-pox, and embellished besides with the scars of many bloody conflicts in the ring. He wore an extraordinary expression ; it was not a grin ; it was not a smirk ; it was a fixed, crafty leer of knowingness.

‘Abram, look at this young man and tell me who he is,’ said the doctor.

The prize-fighter, resting his elbows in the palms of his immense hands, leaned his ugly face forward and stared at me; he contracted his brows whilst he looked as though he hunted through his memory. At last he exclaimed: ‘I devver saw the young gentlebud before.’

‘He says he knows you,’ says the doctor.

‘By sight,’ I exclaimed.

‘That’s dot ibprobable,’ said the prize-fighter, with a glance at the sentry and a complacent look round, and holding up his head.

‘Look at this young man,’ said the doctor.
‘Where have you met him?’

‘Debber saw hib in all by life. S’elp be as true as by ’air’s growig,’ returned the prize-fighter.

‘He says he saw you at Newgate.’

‘I was there,’ answered the prize-fighter, pursing up his leathery under-lip.

‘Observe him well and try to recollect if he was a prisoner?’

‘Dot in by tibe,’ said the prize-fighter.

This insinuation, after what I had said, enraged me. ‘You know I never was a prisoner, sir,’ I cried. ‘You are acting inhumanly in trying to confirm your hopes, but not your suspicions, that I was one. I was on a visit to the jail for my entertainment. My companion and I were conducted to the prisoners’ visiting-room. There I saw Mr. Barney Abram in conversation with a stout, dark lady, gaily attired, and I looked at him with attention because he was pointed out to me as the greatest prize-fighter of the age, and that is why I mentioned his name when you asked me whether I knew any of the convicts on board.’

A savage glow of pleasure brightened the prize-fighter’s eye as he listened ; my audacious address, my reference to the brute’s fame, acted upon his spirits like a can of drink. The sentry eyed me askant ; the warder with a satisfaction which his flat, ruffianly face could not conceal.

‘You saw be talking to by wife,’ said

Barney Abram!—‘a stout, splendid woban, ’adsobly dressed as you put it, sir. The circumstance is all correct.’

‘You can go below,’ said the doctor.

I received a fierce, exulting, congratulatory glance from the bruiser as he turned about in his shackles to re-enter the door. He might have meant to applaud me for my fearless speech, or, which is more likely, he might have meant to wish me luck in the scheme which had brought me into conflict with the surgeon, and which he would naturally hope and believe was criminal.

The doctor now told me to pass on to the quarter-deck, and I thought he meant to take me below and lock me up again. Instead of which he left me standing outside the barricade and went on to the poop, where he joined Captain Sutherland and his military companions, all of whom had been gazing at us from over the brass rail whilst we talked with Mr. Barney Abram. I could not understand the meaning of this doctor’s purposeless questions and behaviour, but I dare

say I was right when I supposed he intended to let everybody see and understand he was first in the ship.

Always, in the days of the convict ship, the unhappy criminals were dispatched across the sea in charge of a naval medical officer appointed by the admiralty, and called the surgeon-superintendent. The ship was virtually placed in his hands to do what he pleased with, and, though I don't suppose he was empowered to interfere in the navigation of the vessel, he was undoubtedly privileged to order the master to call into such ports on the way as he (the surgeon) might choose to name; thereby retarding the voyage of the ship, and perhaps imperilling her, as was the case with a certain convict ship which was nearly lost through the surgeon ordering that she should make Simon's Bay under conditions of season and weather which the captain declared dangerous. Hence there was usually a strong feeling between the surgeon-superintendent and the captain and mates. I suspected something of the sort here, and believed Doctor

Russell-Ellice had given himself a great deal of unnecessary trouble to prove me a rogue, merely that the captain and the mates should see what a very clever fellow he was, and how very much in earnest also in his resolution to strut to the very topmost inches of his little dignity and his brief authority.

CHAPTER XX

SHE CONVERSES WITH HER COUSIN

PRESENTLY I stepped leisurely into the recess under the poop where the soldiers and the women were. One was the pretty young woman who had given me a smile when I came on board the ship at Woolwich. She viewed me with her soft, dark eyes with a wistful admiration, but I could not observe that she remembered me. The three or four soldiers without belts, their jackets unbuttoned, lounged against the bulkhead, smoking their pipes. I was now used to being stared at, and gave them no heed. Whilst I thus stood waiting for what was next to happen, Will came along from his berth forward. When he saw me, he seemed to pause, as though not knowing what to do. With the most pronounced air I could contrive I averted my face and looked into the saloon

through the window, and when I glanced again my cousin was out of sight. I was very much in earnest that he should not get in trouble through me; nay, I desired that for a long time yet he and I should keep as wide apart as the two ends of the ship. He was boyish and imprudent, and might at any moment say or do something that would lead to the disclosure of my sex, and, for all I knew, to the revelation of my motive in hiding in this ship.

The soldiers talked of the convicts, and I pricked up my ears, thirsty for all information of the gloomy, hidden quarters where Tom lived. One asked if the people were kept in irons throughout the voyage. Another answered, No; he believed the irons were taken off after the ship was out of the Bay of Biscay.

‘I couldn’t ’elp laughing,’ said one of the soldiers. ‘I was on sentry below and heard a chap say to some others: “I don’t mind praying, but cussed if I’m going to pray for the Governor of Tasmania! I’ll pray for rain if it’s wanted, but not for a bloomed Governor.”’

“Who asks ye?” says one of the convicts. “It’s to be a part of the prayers,” said the other. “Me pray for the Governor of Tasmania!”—and here he swore and used such language that I had to caution him.’

‘I wouldn’t pray for ne’er a Governor if I was a convick,’ said the pretty young woman, with a toss of her head and a side-glance at me. ‘It’s a shame to make a joke of sacred things. Should a convick be made to pray for his jailer? Would the Lord listen to the prayer of a sailor who asks a blessing on the bo’sun who’s just been flogging him?’

‘There’s some queer chaps downstairs,’ said one of the soldiers. ‘There’s a fellow they call the smasher—a little, gray-haired man with the kindest of faces, and speaks as soft as pouring out milk; he’s lagged for one of the most awful crimes. There’s a play-actor—dunno what right he’s got down there. They sails under false colours. Dessay if he’d got his right name ye’d find him some one as had been tiptop at Drury Lane and the best of theayters. There’s a quiet, pleasing-looking chap, lagged for scuttling.’ A

woman asked what that was. 'Sinking a ship by making a hole in her.'

'The villain !' cried the woman. 'I hope they'll not give him a chance with his tricks here.'

'I'm sorry for that chap, somehow,' said the soldier. 'If I was a painter I'd like to draw his picture. I'll point him out some time or other, and then you take notice, Jim, of his melancholy face. One picks up a lot on sentry.'

'A bad lot,' said another soldier, spitting.

I listened eagerly and longed passionately to ask questions, but durst not. Yet I might be sure that the soldier spoke of Tom, and I loved the fellow for speaking of him kindly; and it was another proof that my sweetheart was in the ship.

A child came and stood in front of me and looked up into my face. It was a pretty little girl. I stooped and patted her cheek and kissed her, took her by the hands and jumped her into a little dance, which kept her laughing. I knew which was the child's father by the pleased look one of the soldiers

regarded me with. It was the man who had spoken kindly of Tom. When I found this out I kissed the child again and talked to her of the ship and the sea. I observed that my manners and speech controlled the listeners. They all knew I was a runaway stowaway, and though they could know no more they might suspect a great deal more. And yet they viewed me respectfully and talked with a sort of civil reference to me as though I was a gentleman, listening.

The lights were burning very red but gradually dimming in the west, and the sides of the seas slipped away from under the ship in hard, dark-green slopes, laced with spray, and the froth of their heads was faintly coloured by the sunset. The heel of the ship was sharp, and she broke through the billows in thunder. There was a mighty noise of whistling and raving aloft, and the strange shrill shrieking of the foaming and dissolving salt alongside made me wonder what that sound in the wind was.

An apprentice came off the poop and struck a bell suspended this side of the quarter-deck barricade. A minute or two

later a convict passed through the door of the main hatch and placed himself beside the sentry; a second and then a third emerged until a considerable number of men had assembled; they formed in a close-packed column which stretched about half-way to the convicts' galley; the soldier with whose child I played, seeing me looking at the convicts, exclaimed: 'They're getting their supper. Them's the messmen. As the fellows receive their cocoa or whate'er it be, from the galley, they carries it below, one by one.'

I imagined that Tom might be amongst that set of convicts, and made a movement with the idea of walking some distance forward, where I should be able to see; but I stopped myself on reflecting that the doctor was probably at the poop rail overhead looking on.

'Taint bad discipline, taking it all round,' said the soldier, speaking to all who chose to listen, though I seemed to find his remarks intended for my amusement or enlightenment. 'It's mostly settled aboard the hulks before the parties come aboard. So I'm told. The

convicts they think proper to trust are made petty officers of. There's first and second captains, captains of divisions, captains of wards. Then some of them are made cooks of, t'others barbers, and every mess has its head. With this sort of arrangement they keeps each other in order.'

'Do any privileges go along with these appointments?' asked one of the soldiers.

'The privilege of being appointed.'

I listened, but asked no questions. I dared not exhibit interest. I could not forget that these soldiers formed a portion of the convicts' guard.

'I notice,' said one of the soldiers, 'that they puts them there malefactors to all sorts of ship's work. They were helping the sailors wash the deck down this morning. They work hard, as though eddicated under the muzzle of the carbine. A sight of difference there was 'twixt the sailors' scrubbing and their'n.'

I was watching the convicts whilst I listened to the soldier's talk, when some one inside of the cuddy called out: 'Marlowe!'

I forgot my feigned name, and did not respond. The voice again called, on which, with a start, I looked through the cuddy door and saw the steward.

‘I reckoned as much,’ said he, with a laugh. ‘’Taint every purser’s name as fits like old boots. Step this way.’

I entered. Just then the doctor came down the companion-steps at the end of the cuddy and entered an after-cabin on the port side. He paused a moment, as though to observe me, but did not speak. A young man, whom I supposed to be an under-steward, was lighting the cabin lamps, but there still lived a wild flush of western light, and you saw plainly by it.

The steward began by informing me that I had no business in the ship; that by stowing myself away on board a convict ship I risked the chance of being made a felon of, of receiving six dozens at the gangway, of being hanged at the yard-arm. In thus reassuring me he gave himself the airs of the captain of the ship. He then added: ‘However, I like your looks, as I told you before, and I’ve put

in a good word for you with Captain Sutherland, who, I may tell you, don't think any the worse of a youngster like you for squaring up, as he's heard you've done, to the doctor. The doctor himself owned to the captain,' said he, lowering his voice and looking aft toward the surgeon's cabin, 'that he got rather more from you than he knew what to do with.' He then abruptly inquired if I possessed any clothes besides those I wore. I answered I had not.

'Got any money?'

'How much ought I to want?'

'How much ha' ye got?' said he.

'All I shall need on my arrival,' said I.

He looked puzzled, eyed me all over, then approaching me by a step he exclaimed with an earnest, confidential face: 'Jokin' apart, young man, who are you and what's your object in cutting this here caper?' Finding I did not reply, he continued: 'You're to have all the money you want when you arrive? And you haven't money enough to pay your passage to get what's awaiting for you?' He paused. 'Well, now, see here.

You've got no business aboard, and you stood to be whipped, and you stood to be hanged for hiding in a Government transport. You've got to be fed, and gent or no gent, you must work.'

'I'm willing and anxious to work.'

'The captain's handed you over to me. There's plenty of hands for'ard, most of them about as sarviceable at a pinch as you'd be likely to prove. We're short of a man aft, and you'll do for the post. Can you wait at table?'

'I'll try.'

'Well, you may rise to it. We'll see. You'll be wanted to carry the dirty dishes for'ard for the cook's mate to wash, to help bring the dishes along from the galley, and to hang about here whilst the officers are eating, ready to run to the galley on arrands.'

'I'll do all that willingly,' said I.

He then told me that the second steward slung his hammock next door to the pantry in the steerage, but as there were two or three empty cabins down there I was welcome to use a bunk in the one in which I had been

locked up. ‘As for a bed,’ said he—‘you’d better ask the sailmaker to give you a piece of old canvas, and the butcher to give you a bundle of straw; you’ll get all the mattress you’ll want out of that. If I can meet with a stray blanket you shall have it. That pilot jacket, though a good coat, ain’t quite up to the knocker for table work. Pity you haven’t got a little loose cash upon you. I’ve got a spare jacket which,’ said he, taking a view of my shoulders, ‘would fit you for breadth to a hair. But not to button across; why, I never see such a chest on a young fellow. And now you can turn to,’ said he; ‘the table’s to be got ready for dinner and you can help.’

I requested him to lend me some soap and a towel. He grinned and asked me if there was any perfumery he could oblige me with. ‘But you’re right,’ said he. ‘You’re in want of a wash-down.’ He left me, and presently returned with a piece of marine soap and a coarse towel. He then told me where I should find a bucket, and recommended me to draw some water at the head pump on the forecastle, and to be careful not to spill any on the deck

as I brought it along if I did not want to be sworn at by the officer of the watch.

I took a bucket from a rack near the mainmast and went along the gangway, as I term the alley betwixt the barricade and the bulwarks. My heart was almost light. The work I was to be put to was just such as I should have chosen out of the whole group of duties of the big ship. It was work that would keep me away from the forecastle hands ; it would not put more upon me than my strength was equal to. Best of all, I was to occupy a cabin alone, which was an extraordinary piece of good fortune.

It was the first dog-watch. All the convicts were in their prison quarters ; a number of sailors were smoking, idling, and talking in the neighbourhood of the galleys ; the wind swept keen and hard athwart the forecastle ; and the sentry was the only figure that paced that deck. Some rough chaff saluted me as I passed the sailors. One asked if I was going a-milking ; another advised me to chuck the bucket overboard and watch it tow. Just as I was stepping up the forecastle ladder, Will,

with a pipe in his mouth, put his head out of his berth. He instantly saw me, and called out, with the manner of a young fellow exercising some little authority :

‘Where are you taking that bucket to?’

‘On to the forecastle for water, sir,’ I answered.

‘Do you know anything about rigging a head pump?’ he exclaimed. ‘Not you!’ he cried, laughing with a fine assumption of half-jocose, half-pitying good nature. ‘Here, I’ll show you what to do.’

He followed me up the ladder. Upon the forecastle the wind was blowing with a great roaring noise. The sentry leaned against it, and his heavily coated figure swayed like a scarecrow in a breezy field as he swung on his gripping feet to the plunge and toss of the bow. The surge, rent by the sheering cut-water, rose in a boiling mass of whiteness to within reach of the rail when the ship pitched. The driven fabric swept the sea from her weather bow in smoke, and at every stately curtsey a vast sheet of foam washed many fathoms ahead. The sea ridged dark and

hard. The ship heeled sharply over under great breasts of canvas, and from the fore-castle you saw the froth race past her on either hand, and lift astern like a snow-covered path.

‘This was my chance and the first chance, Marian,’ said Will. ‘How are you getting on?’

‘Well.’

‘We’ll seem to loiter a bit over this pump. What are they going to do with you?’

I told him.

‘What! Cuddy bottle-washer? And the steward’s the cad of the ship. There are many cads amongst us, but he’s head of the clan here.’

‘I’m perfectly satisfied, Will. I wish I could see Tom. I want to see him with my own eyes.’

‘Hold the bucket so,’ said he, ‘and I’ll pump. Oh, never mind the sentry. No notice is taken of soldiers at this end of the ship. I could hug you for your pluck, I could. After all these days of black hole under here to talk to the captain and doctor as I heard you! Where do you sleep?’

All this while he was pretending to work the brake of the pump as though something was wrong with it. I answered.

‘Come, that’s good,’ said he ; ‘a cabin to yourself! They couldn’t have given you more had they charged you sixty guineas.’

‘I have no mattress and nothing to sleep on but the bunk-boards,’ said I.

‘And no bedclothes, of course?’ said he.

‘The steward has promised me the loan of a blanket if he can find one.’

‘Leave me to see what I can do,’ he exclaimed.

‘Run no risks, Will, for both our sakes.’

‘Do you want your money, Marian?’

‘No, I was searched. If I produce money now, they’ll guess I have a friend on board. Will, there’s one thing you must contrive: Let me have pencil and paper. Not now. Wait for a better chance. There will be plenty. I must write to him.’

‘How are you going to give him a letter?’

‘I’ll find a way, Will.’

‘Marian, there’s no man under these stars,

which are beginning to shine, who's worth what you're doing for Tom. How cold the wind blows! And aren't they driving the old bucket just! I know what it will be—eight bells, and Balls's infernal pipe, and an hour's roosting up amongst those boughs there to reef and stow. You don't want all that water to wash in.'

He emptied two-thirds of the bucket, put the strap into my hand, and we went down the forecastle ladder. The steward, who was helping the other man to lay the cloth, asked what had kept me so long.

'The pump's stiff,' said I, 'and it blows hard on the fo'c'sle.'

'Hard in your eye!' he exclaimed. 'Look lively now! There must be no skulking. If you don't bear a hand here, I'll send you forward to the bo'sun and the land of ropes' ends and kicks.'

The under-steward laughed heartily. I went briskly to my cabin, and washed my face and hands as well as I could in the dark. I found nothing in the steward's language to anger me—nothing in my situation to cause

me an instant's regret. The truth is, I was extraordinarily encouraged and supported by the sense of my sex—by the thought that I need but avow myself to become an object of romantic interest, and so be, at all events, humanely treated. Indeed, I caught myself laughing when I put my hand into the upper bunk to feel for the parcel of my wearing apparel. What, I thought to myself, would the steward think if I were to dress myself in those clothes and enter the cuddy?

CHAPTER XXI

SHE ENTERS UPON HER DUTIES

I DID but little on this the first day of my entering upon my strange new duties. The steward distrusted my sea-legs, and he and his mate fetched the dishes from the galley. I hung about the fore-end of the cuddy, put the dirty plates into the basket, collected the knives and forks, went on errands to the pantry and the like. The picture of the cuddy was bright and hearty. Two large illuminated globes, in silver holders, swung under the ceiling; the light of them flashed in the mirrors and rippled with the movements of the ship in the polished woodwork. The captain sat at the head of the table, the doctor on his right. Captain Barrett and Lieutenant Chimmo sat together on the other side. Once or twice Captain Barrett screwed his glass into his eye and looked at me, but

his gaze expressed no more than surprise to find me at work as a cuddy servant. The others took not the least notice of me.

Captain Barrett had a loud laugh and a hearty manner of speaking ; Lieutenant Chimmo was thin of voice, stilted and affected, so stiff and snobbish as to satisfy me he was not a born gentleman. I wondered to find neither of the mates at the table, but I soon discovered that it was the custom on board the *Childe Harold* for the mate of the watch to come below and eat after the captain was done, the other two mates joining him when possible, so as to make a separate table.

The talk at the beginning was not very interesting. The convict guard, it seems, had come to the ship from Chatham, and neither Captain Barrett nor the lieutenant could say too much in abuse of that place. There was no society ; dirt and drink formed the life of the town. Deptford, nay even Sheerness, was sweet and desirable compared to Chatham. The doctor ate and drank water with a little wine in it and seemed to listen. The captain frequently lifted his eyes to the skylight as

though thinking more of the weather than of the officers' chatter. Presently Captain Barrett, leaning across the table, said to the doctor :

'Chimmo and I have been wondering whether you'd have any objection, after the fellow's irons are knocked off, I mean, to Barney Abram coming aft to give us a few lessons in sparring ? I dare say, captain, your sailmaker could contrive to furnish out an arrangement of canvas and oakum to answer for boxing-gloves.'

'It would be impossible to imagine any objection stronger than mine to your suggestion,' said the doctor.

'There'd be always a sentry at hand, you know,' said Lieutenant Chimmo.

'Let us change the subject,' said the doctor severely.

Captain Barrett looked at the doctor with a slight sneer and said : ' We'll not talk of bringing Barney Abram aft ; we'll talk of Barney Abram as he is. Pity so much talent should go wrong. Transport your felonious clergy, attorneys, farmers, medical men,' he

added, with a significant look at the doctor, 'there'd always then be too many to spare. But to send such a prize-fighter as Barney Abram out of the kingdom! To ship him into a country where there'll be nobody to appreciate him! By Heaven, it's as bad as robbing the crown of England of a jewel!'

The captain, observing that the doctor did not like this talk, changed the subject by speaking of the fine progress the ship was making. At this moment I was sent to the pantry by the steward. When I returned, I heard Lieutenant Chimmo say: 'What would those chaps under hatches give for a taste of that curried fowl! Your cook's a neat hand, captain.'

'The provisions served out to the convicts are infernally bad,' said Captain Barrett.

"They are not good, but they may be eaten," as Charles XII. said to the soldier who showed him some mouldy pieces of bread,' exclaimed the doctor.

'At such a table as this,' said Lieutenant Chimmo, 'a man can take a philosophic view

of the tastes and appetites of people who are ill-fed.'

'Convicts are as well fed as sailors,' said Captain Sutherland.

'I'd rather be a convict than a sailor,' said Captain Barrett.

'One's t'other more often than not,' observed Lieutenant Chimmo. 'Stonishing what a lot of rascals sail afore the mast!'

'Take care that whisper don't get forward of the main-hatch sentry,' said the captain, with a glance at the steward. 'Jack's got a sensitive side to his nature.'

'Doctor, what's to be the routine when decent weather sets in?' inquired Captain Barrett.

'Schools, Bible classes, and frequent prayer-meetings, sir,' answered the doctor.

'Don't educate them,' said Lieutenant Chimmo. 'They're very bad now; education'll make them worse.'

'I'm with Chimmo,' said Captain Barrett. 'Doctor, I'll wager you what you will that the worst of your people are those who are most intelligent and best educated.'

The doctor made no answer.

‘I must state this as a fact,’ said Captain Sutherland, with a side look at the doctor, as though distrusting his topic: ‘Mr. Bates, my chief officer, recognised one of the convicts. His name—’ The doctor made a motion with his hand. ‘Well, enough if I say,’ exclaimed the captain, stammering, ‘that this same man is a person of excellent antecedents, was for years at sea, and held several posts of trust, and finally wound up a flourishing career by investing his savings in a smart little barque for no other purpose than to scuttle her that he might pocket about triple the amount of his venture in insurance money.’

I heard this, and my heart turned hot. I longed to walk up to Captain Sutherland, look him in the eyes, and call him a beast and a liar. No one observed me, which was lucky. I was conscious that my face worked with agitation and that my cheeks were red with the blood which the captain’s lie had driven into my head. At this point the steward bade me carry a basket of dirty

dishes to the galley, and I stepped out with my burden upon the quarter-deck.

The evening was black and the wind wet, and it swept athwart the bulwark-rail with a shriek and a bite of frost. Over the lee-rail the seas ran from the ship in pale, cloudy heaps. Occasionally the brine lashed the forecastle like a showering of small shot, and again and again you'd feel the blow of a sea on the bow striking the ship before she could rise, and the white water of it was flashed back into the dark wind, though the hissing body came like a thunder-squall, an instant later, soaking the decks till the scuppers sobbed again.

I staggered along with the basket of crockery, and passing the sentry, slipped and slid forward through the convicts' inclosure till I came to the ship's galley. A number of seamen were gathered under the lee of this place. The red fire of the stove illuminated the fat figure of the cook as he stood pointing a piece of paper to the flame of the lamp to light his pipe. Another fellow was busy at a kind of dresser. Against

the closed weather-door leaned the boatswain with folded arms and an inverted pipe betwixt his lips. It was a hot, snug, mellow interior to look in upon after the cheerless scene of the decks and the leaning and waving heights of dim canvas above.

‘So they’ve found work for you, hey?’ said the boatswain, giving me a large nod. ‘Yet you’d better ha’ stopped at home.’

‘Who’s this?’ said the cook.

‘The youngster as I found rolled up in a spare t’gallan’s’l,’ answered the boatswain. ‘They’re a going to keep him in the land o’ knives and forks.’

‘And you’d rather be a waiter than a steward, Joey?’ said the cook with a greasy chuckle. ‘I don’t blame you. It’s all night in with us idlers, and a warm blanket’s better than a lee earing, ain’t it, Mr. Balls? But what’s brought the covey to ship in this here convick barge?’

‘What ha’ you got there?’ said the fellow at the dresser.

‘Dirty plates,’ said I.

This man, who was the cook’s mate, who

had but one eye, and whose cast of face was certainly more villainous than any of the felons I had watched taking their exercise that day, put his head out of the galley-door, and exclaimed: 'Fire that there steward! Here's a gallus look out o' dishes! If that there perishin' Stiles could foul six plates 'stead o' wan he'd do't to spite me.' He continued to grumble hideously, and I backed away from his ugly tongue and uglier face and walked toward the cuddy, but slowly, and holding on as I went, for the decks were steep and greasy and the ship was taking the seas in quick, angry jumps.

As I passed through the quarter-deck barricade my elbow was touched, and Will accosted me.

'I'm going to bounce a mattress out of the steward for you, Marian,' said he, 'but as no more lies than can be helped must be told, follow me.'

I accompanied him up the lee poop ladder. He led me a little way along the deck and then crossed it to where a man was standing under the shelter of one of the quarter boats.

‘Here’s this stowaway lad asked me to help him to a mattress, sir,’ he exclaimed. ‘They’ve given him a bunk in the steerage, but there’s nothing in it to lie upon.’

‘He deserves the cat for hiding aboard us,’ answered the man, who was indeed Mr. Bates, the first mate. ‘What have they put him to, d’ye know, Johnstone?’

‘He’s cuddy bottle-washer, sir.’

‘What’s brought you to sea, you young fool?’

‘I want to get to Tasmania, sir.’

‘Why didn’t you concern yourself in some riot, or turn Irish politician; they’d have clothed and bedded and fed and sent you across handsomely, and perhaps have fitted you with a good berth ashore at the end; instead, you start as a sneak, and, no doubt, you’ll come home as a sneak. Mattress—mattress—I’ve got nothing to do with that. Shift for yourself and be off.’

I went on to the quarter-deck, wondering what on earth Will meant by taking me to the mate, as though to provoke him to abuse me. Before I entered the cuddy my cousin

was at my elbow. You will remember that it was very dark and nobody but the sentry was on the quarter-deck.

‘It’s all right,’ said he eagerly. ‘I’ll manage it now. Wait a bit. You must have a bed to lie on, you know. Don’t take to heart what the mate says. It’s his duty to growl at you, but as a man he’s sound to the heels.’

They were still at table in the cuddy. It was hard to realise that the vessel was a prison-ship when you looked at this bright, rich interior, with its soft yellow lamps flashing under the skylights and the looking-glasses reduplicating the sparkling and hospitable furniture of the table. It was like passing from another state of life to enter this brightness and warmth from the wet and nipping blackness outside, with the grim, dark figure of the sentry, the barricades, the blackness and silence of the sentineled main-hatch.

The steward sent me to the pantry to wash glasses, and I went with his assistant, a fellow named Franz or Frank, a young German. I had not before known him for a German; I

believe I had not heard him speak. He was a freckled, ginger-coloured man, as expressionless of face as an oyster. But he was good-tempered and willing, and when we were in the pantry washing glasses he said that he hoped we should be friends. I answered it would not be my fault if we were not good friends. On this he shook hands with me and asked if I was ever in Germany. He wished to know why I had stowed myself away in this convict ship and if I had friends in Tasmania.

‘I need not have hidden,’ said I. ‘My friends are well-to-do.’

‘Dot I can believe,’ said he, polishing a tumbler and closing one eye while he held it to the lamp. ‘You vhas a young gentleman. Dot I hear in your voice. Maybe you vhas more of a gentleman dan some dot ve waits on. How do you like Mr. Stiles?’ naming the steward.

‘He is a funny man.’

‘How vhas he funny?’ said he.

‘He made you laugh heartily when he talked to me.’

‘Dot vhas to please him. For my part——’
He shrugged his shoulders. He then inquired if I had agreed for any wages, and expressed sorrow that we were not to share a berth. ‘I likes to make you my chum—dot is der verdt—whilst ve vhas togedder.’

Presently the steward called to us, and when I entered the cuddy I found Mr. Bates at table and the captain and officers gone. Mr. Bates was very quick with his dinner. He had charge of the deck. I believe he was not above ten minutes in despatching his meal. He took no notice of me. When he was gone, I helped the two stewards to strip the table, and whilst this was doing Will Johnstone put his head in at the cuddy door and called to the steward.

‘There’s some spare convicts’ mattresses stowed away aft,’ said he, in the peremptory voice of the sea. ‘You’re to let Marlowe have one; and throw in a couple of the convicts’ blankets for his use. D’ye hear me, steward?’

‘Yes, I hear you, young gentleman,’ answered the steward. ‘But who sent me that bit of noose?’

Will, however, had backed a step and disappeared in the blackness.

‘The order comes from Mr. Bates, I expect,’ said I. ‘I stepped on to the poop some time since, to see if he’d let me have a mattress.’

‘Well, pink me if you was behind the door when cheek was sarved out,’ said the steward. ‘Did he offer to throw you overboard?’

‘He asked me many questions. Mr. Bates seems one of the kindest-hearted of men.’

The steward stared at me for a moment, muttered to himself, and then, with something of an agitated hand, proceeded in his work of stripping the table. However, Will’s ruse, or ‘bounce,’ as he had called it, proved successful. Mr. Stiles, of course, supposed that the apprentice had come with direct instructions; and when he had cleared the table he took me into the steerage and, opening a cabin door, held up a lantern and bade me choose a mattress. A number of convicts’ mattresses lay stowed here, every one with a little pillow attached to it, and every one was numbered, as though as a provision for a larger assemblage

of miscreants than had been shipped. Here, also, were two or three bales of spare blankets, to a couple of which I helped myself; and now, thanks to Will, I had a bed to lie on and clothes to cover me.

In my own berth, as I may call it, I said to the steward, pointing to the bundle in the upper bunk: 'That can be left there. It will not be in the way.'

'What is it?' said he. 'Oh, it was brought aboard just afore we started, and the captain gave it to me, thinking it might belong to some of the soldiers or their wives as 'd presently be claiming it. It's a horror,' said he, looking at the parcel, 'though the name of this vessel's wrote big enough for a monkey to read without glasses. Let it lie. It's out of the ways here.' Then, looking around him, he lost his temper. 'Here's a pretty go!' he cried. 'To think of a Woolwich stowaway berthed in such a beautiful bedroom as this here! It's a-flying in the face of right, and it's a-courting and caressing of wickedness to make any one as has done wrong so comfortable. If this gets wind, suffocate me if stowaways won't breed

thick as fleas in vessels' holds ! But you'll have to work.'

'I'll work, and work well,' said I, smiling ; 'and as you treat me so shall your reward be.'

He held the lantern to my face and said : 'Where?'

'Hobart Town.'

'There's no use a-dangling that sort of fly,' said he ; 'I'm no one-eyed fish. When I rise, it's to summat juicy, with ne'er a hook in its inside. Never you mind about Hobart Town, but turn to and get your supper.'

I went to the pantry, where I found Frank. We supped off a dish that had come from the cabin table. Frank informed me that had the captain sent me to live before the mast, I should never have beheld or tasted such a dish even in my dreams. 'They starfs you,' said he ; 'pork dot vhas deadt of der measles, und beef dot vhas a horse until dey salt her down into casks.' Again he endeavoured to ascertain who I was and what I meant to do on my arrival in Hobart Town. He said, if my connections were flourishing people, he'd be very grateful if I'd put in a good word for

him. He was not born to this sort of life; he had seen better days, wrote a good hand, and could correspond in three tongues. He had signed articles for the round voyage, but was ready to run from the ship if a chance offered.

I looked mysterious and smiled knowingly, and said I guessed that when my friends heard my story they would be glad to do a kindness to any one who had proved a friend to me during the passage. He put oil into my cabin-lamp and showed me how to trim it, and assured me that any little conveniences which he possessed were at my service. I learned that my work ended at nine. At half-past eight, the materials for grog were placed upon the cabin table, and at two bells I was at liberty to go to bed.

‘But you’ll understand,’ said the steward, who gave me this information, ‘that if all ’ands is called you must turn out. It’ll be for me to sing down the hatch “All ’ands,” and you don’t stop to dress, but rush up, for you’re never to know what hawful things ain’t on the heve of ’appening when that loud cry of “All

'ands" rings through such a big ship as this, and if you don't turn out, then of course you'll be one of them parties as feel sorry for themselves next day.'

When two bells were struck I went into the recess under the poop to take a look at the labouring ship and the dark night before going to bed. The canvas had been reefed at eight o'clock; at that hour, and for some time after, I had heard the wild hoarse notes of sailors singing out at the ropes, and the cannonading of heavy sails whose released halyards had abandoned the slack canvas to the thrashing gale. The ship was rushing along her course, climbing the high seas and whitening out the water till the seething waves gleamed like moonlight round about her. Captain Barrett and the doctor were playing at chess in the cuddy; the subaltern looked on with a paper cigar drooping at his mouth. All seemed dark and at rest down the hatch where the soldiers' quarters were. I thought to myself if this ship were to strike another and founder, what chance for their lives would the two hundred

and thirty men below have, lying, for all I knew, in their irons, so battened down that nothing short of an explosion could lift the hatch for them.

A figure approached and peered in my face; the cabin lamp-light was upon him; it was Will.

‘Is that you?’ said he doubtfully.

On my replying, he put his hand into his pocket and gave me a little parcel. ‘Here’s a pencil and paper for you, Marian,’ said he. ‘Be mighty careful in writing, and don’t mention my name. You can’t be too cautious. The sentries’ eyes are as keen as their bayonets. Have you a mattress?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why don’t you go to bed?’

‘I am off in a minute.’

‘This is no place for you. I wish you were at home in Stepney.’ He went on to the poop, and I descended to my berth.

CHAPTER XXII

SHE SEES HER SWEETHEART

THE convict mattress was hard, and the pillow was hard, and the blankets as coarse as manufacture could contrive; yet I would not have exchanged them for my own soft bed and linen at home. I was now sleeping as Tom did: I was on board a convict ship as he was; and some of the company I should be forced to keep were scarcely less rough than the felons below. I should be doing work by day almost as hard, perhaps, as Tom would be put to; I was, therefore, not only hand in hand with my love in the sympathy of suffering, I was bearing almost as heavy a burden as weighed upon him; and even his degradation was as much mine as though I, too, were a convict, for he was my sweetheart, and one day, God willing, would be

my husband, and whatever touched him touched me as though we had been one.

These were my thoughts as I pulled the convict blankets over me and put my head upon the little, hard, convict pillow, and lay for a while listening to the torrent of foam that thundered past the porthole. I then fell asleep, and my sleep was deep and dreamless as death, so exhausted was I; and when I awoke, the cabin was glimmering out to the light of the newly-broken morning, and I beheld the young man Frank standing beside me.

He told me it was time to turn out; the steward was calling for me; there was the cabin deck to scrub and the cuddy to be got ready for breakfast.

‘I’ll follow you in an instant,’ said I.

‘Do you know,’ said he, going to the door, ‘dot you vhas very goodt-looking? It vhas lucky you hov goodt teeth, you show them even in your sleep. I sometimes belief I must hov seen your sister. But hov you a sister?’

‘No,’ said I, rubbing my eyes and troubled

by these questions, and wishing he would go.

‘Vell, I vhas a waiter for two or three months at the Brunswick Hotel in der East India Docks, and I remember a handsome young lady dot came in once or twice in dot time. She vhas so much like you she might easily hov been your sister.’

He went out when he had said this. I had no time to reflect, but certainly I had found no air of suspicion in his manner. It took me but a minute to plunge my face in cold water and go out, having lain down for warmth, fully dressed, save my cap and shoes. On showing myself, the steward told me to get a bucket and go on the poop and fetch water from the pump, which the apprentices and some ordinary seamen were washing down the deck by.

I mounted the companion-ladder and found the morning brightening into sunshine. The sea in the east was radiant with sliding hills of silver; the sky was a delicate azure, high, with small feather-shaped clouds linked like lacework. Passing us at the distance of a

mile was a large ship with flags flying. She was bowing the sea somewhat heavily, and made a noble picture as she crushed the brine into snow under her massive forefoot, yielding to the surge till the line of her green copper showed with a long, wet flash, whilst the soft whiteness of her canvas ran trembling in shadows to her trucks with her tossing, where it blended with the feather-shaped clouds, so that you could scarce tell one from another.

Our own ship was clothed with sail to the royal yards, with dark lines of damp where the reefs had been lately shaken out. I was too far aft to see the main deck. Smoke from the chimneys of the two galleys blew black and brisk over the bow, showing that the wind nearly followed us. The sailors were washing down, the head pump was going, and buckets were being handed along from the forecastle, where stood the sentry in a grey coat with his bayonet gleaming like silver. The first person I saw on the poop was my cousin Will. He and several others were scrubbing the deck hard with brushes,

whilst a broad-shouldered apprentice flung pailfuls of water along the planks. Will turned his head and saw me, but took no further notice. Mr. Bates, the chief mate, stood near the wheel, and I observed that he watched me whilst I filled my bucket at the little pump that was kept a-gushing by an active young seaman. It was a strange real picture of ship-board life on the high seas. The cold of the night was still in the wind, and not yet had the sun extinguished the melancholy of the gray dawn in the distant recesses of the west.

I saw no convict, but when I returned to the cuddy with my bucket full of water, on looking through the windows which commanded a view of the main deck, I observed a number of the felons all hard at work brushing, swabbing and cleaning. For an hour I worked with Frank, scrubbing the cuddy deck, drying it, replacing the lengths of carpet and so on. The steward then told me to get a hook-pot from the pantry and go to the galley for some hot coffee for Frank and myself. I found a hook-pot and stepped

on to the quarter-deck, meaning to walk forward by the narrow gangway; but a number of seamen on some job there blocked it, so I went past the sentry at the barricade gate.

I was trembling, and felt myself pale. There were many convicts about, and any one at a moment might turn and prove to be Tom. Some were coiling ropes away, some slapped the deck with swabs, some were cleaning the paintwork; they were all ironed. The decks, dark with brine, were greasy, the motions of the ship quick and uncomfortable, and the irons, robbing the limbs of all elasticity, caused many of the unhappy wretches to slide and stagger as they moved about, for which they would be sharply and sometimes brutally yelled at by the convicts who overseered them. The prize-fighter was savagely swabbing near the main hatch. He struck the deck as though he would split it. I was obliged to pass him close. He saw me and nodded, and said in a low, thick, sarcastic voice, 'Dice work to put a gentlebud to.'

'Attend to what you're about there!'

roared a man on the other side of the deck.

I pushed on. A convict stood at the ship's side, coiling a rope over a pin. His face was averted, but as I neared him he moved his head to look in the direction of the poop. It was Tom. Our eyes met. He did not know me and turned his gaze away, then looked again, then stared as if paralysed. His hands were arrested as though he had been struck dead; his face whitened to the complexion of death. I brushed past him close, saying in a low voice, but distinctly, 'Tom, dearest, it is Marian. We are together and shall yet be happy,' and so saying I went on without again looking and entered the ship's galley.

But the sudden encounter, seeing him in irons, so affected me that I could scarcely draw my breath. I noticed with a pang of exquisite distress that he looked ill; his complexion an unhealthy white, his cheeks sunk, his eyes hollow and leaden. When I was in the galley I stood struggling to get my breath before attempting to speak; then I heard a

commotion outside. The stout cook pushed past me, and, putting his head through the galley-door, cried, after staring a few moments : ' Blowed if it don't look as if the poor chap was dying ! '

I sprang through the door and saw Tom supported by two or three convicts. He lay in their arms in the posture of a man lifted on to his feet but unable to stand. In a minute or two he struggled and stood erect, and I heard him say : ' There, lads, I thank you. Just a passing faintness. Take no more heed of me ; ' and, picking up the rope, he continued in his task of coiling it over the pin. I watched him coil a second rope away and then re-entered the galley.

' I wonder them coves ain't a-fainting every hour,' said the cook, as he filled my hook-pot with hot coffee. ' No grog and no baccy ! Think of that ; and a vindier diet than fo'c'sle allowance. Burgoo may be good eating for them as thinks the bagpipes good music ; but you may take it from me, my lad, that it ain't the sort of stuff for a growed-up man to go to bed on. There's too much sop

a-going in prison fare. A gent who's brought himself up for years on champagne, salmon, and the best of eating, signs the wrong name to a bit of paper and 's put aboard a ship like this, where he gets nothen to eat but cocoa and ship's beef and burgoo. Can the likes of such men help fainting? Ask yourself. I dessey the covey as swounded just now was a nob in his way before he was took. There's no telling who's who down below. Out of the road now, my lively! Here's the sailors a-coming for their tea.'

I got into the narrow gangway and so made my way aft that I might not again pass Tom. My dread was for myself rather than for him. If I drew close and once more looked him in the face, my passion of love must vent itself in some desperate betraying manner. Girl as I was, I found a curse in my heart for the barbarity that weighted my sweetheart's ankles with iron, and a curse for the law that had suffered two villains to swear his liberty, fortune, happiness away and make a broken-hearted convict of him.

I drank a little coffee in the pantry with

my fellow-servant, but ate nothing. The German supposed I was fretting over having run away and good-naturedly tried to cheer me. However, as the time passed, my spirits improved, for now I knew beyond all doubt that Tom was on board; and he also knew beyond all doubt that I was with him, and it comforted me to reflect that without any further explanation he would understand why I had made no attempt to bid him farewell at Woolwich.

And still I was anxious. He would soon discover, by observing me as I passed to and fro, that I had been put to menial work unfit for the lady of his love, for the girl of his heart, for a woman who had been greatly indulged, who knew nothing of hardships, whose means were ample for one of her degree. I feared his spirit would chafe and fret over the thought of my being a common helper in the cabin—cuddy-deck scrubber, a ship's scullery boy—and that to deliver me from these degrading offices he might betray me, tell the story of our love, and exactly reveal my condition, not doubting, I dare say,

that Captain Sutherland would then charge me for my passage and treat me as a passenger. And, indeed, I should have been very willing to be a passenger, to pay any exorbitant sum for that privilege, had the thing been contrivable now that I was on board. But could it have been managed? No. Because whether I revealed myself as a woman with a secret which nothing could make her avow, or whether I owned my sex and frankly declared that I had followed Tom because of my love for him, in either case the stern and suspicious doctor would either oblige me to land at any port we had occasion to water at, or compel the captain to pass me into the first ship that would receive me.

I found an opportunity after the cuddy breakfast things had been cleared away to write a letter to Tom. I wrote in my cabin and used the pencil and paper my cousin had given to me. Whilst I wrote I had not felt so tranquil in spirits, so easy, nay, so happy in my heart, for months. Tom was near me. Nothing but death or ocean calamity could separate us till we arrived at Tasmania, and

then I should be in the same land with him, with opportunities that I could not now imagine ; this writing was like talking to him, and the sweeter because it was secret ; no governor would first read my letter.

I wrote very small, in pencil, that I might put much into narrow compass. I told him of the arrangements I had made before leaving home, why I had dressed as a boy, why I had hidden myself in this convict ship instead of following by a passenger vessel. I gave him my reasons for desiring to continue as a boy, and wound up by begging him to keep up his heart, to be sure we should be happy yet in the new land, and I implored him to feel easy as to my situation, my duties being light, my berth comfortable, and my associates civil and obliging.

I folded this letter into the smallest square I could pack it into, and put it into my waistcoat pocket ready to convey to Tom at some such another opportunity as had befallen that morning. But as it turned out, the weather changed that day, and for four successive days it blew hard, with incessant rain, which

often flashed in whole sheets of water betwixt the reeling masts, and not a convict appeared on deck except the messmen at meal-times to pass the food below.

During one of these wet and howling days, when the ship, under small canvas, was swinging over the hills of pallid water, I stood in the recess under the break of the poop. My work was done; I had stepped out to look at the ship before going to bed. The vessel rushed through the night in darkness, and the night itself lay black as ink around the sea with a little faintness over our mast-heads as though there was a moon there. I was about to go to bed, when Will came off the poop and, distinguishing me in the light that lay on the cuddy windows, he screwed himself into a dark corner, and called. I went down the slope of deck.

‘I have been talking about you to the chief mate,’ said he. ‘I have told him that by an accident I have found out who you are. I said your mother’s name was Marlowe, and that your father, in his life, was a client of my father’s. Mr. Bates supposes that your

mother married a cousin of her own name. I told him I knew that you were thoroughly respectable, and that you had left your home because your stepfather led you a dog's life.'

'What was the good of your telling him all this?' said I, feeling very angry, though I controlled myself. 'But I know how it'll end. You'll talk and talk till you betray me, and then that odious doctor will take the first opportunity to turn me out of the ship. All that I have suffered and passed through will go for nothing, and I shall lose sight of Tom, and perhaps be separated from him for ever,' and now I felt as if I must cry.

'Don't talk like a fool,' said Will; 'I'm not going to betray you. I want to go on helping you as I helped you from the start, but as I ought never to have helped you. How are you going to get any clothes? Think! Don't talk of the slop-chest. You're not on the articles. There'll not be a farthing coming to you. You've been searched, and, as you said yourself, it's out of the question you should produce money now. Will the

captain trust a stowaway? Of course not. So there's no slop-chest so far as you're concerned. Yet how long d'ye think those clothes of yours are going to hang upon your body, scrubbing and messing about in them as you are all day long? And when wear has turned them into Irish pennants, what are you going to do for a shift of duds? Why, you must come to me, of course. But how can I help you if I don't know you in some such a way as to justify me in taking an interest in you? Now do you see what I would be at?' cried he, giving me a soft, playful chuck under the chin.

'Yes, I understand now. I ask your pardon. You are clever and look ahead.'

'Well, that's all right,' said he; 'and now I shall be able to give you a shift of linen and to mostly rig you out. Most of what's in my chest was given to me by you. Nobody can say a word when it's understood that your father was a client of the old man's. It'll raise you in the general esteem, also. So, say what you will, I've done you a good turn this blessed night. And now get to bed

away out of this filthy yowling. Look how sweetly it rains! And I've still three hours to stand!'

With that he made a spring on to the poop-ladder and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIII

SHE VISITS THE BARRACKS

I HAVE said that this passage of wet, violent weather lasted about four days. On the morning of the fourth day of it the steward sent me to the galley on some errand I forget the nature of. The cook was wild with temper. Everything seemed to have gone wrong with him. The baker had offered to fight him for his day's allowance of rum. He had scalded himself, besides, during an unusually heavy lurch. When I looked in on him he swore and told me to wait. It was all the same to me. It had ceased to rain, and I stood under the lee of the galley for shelter from the wind.

It was a grey, dark, dismal, roaring day. The seas rolled in hills of green, and the foam of them, as their heads broke, was blown high up in white smoke. The ship looked strained

aloft. Her lee rigging and gear were arched out by the gale; the bands of topsails were dusky with wet, and the wind screamed like children flying in terror. The barricades gave the ship a most miserable appearance. The decks sobbed with the ceaseless soaking, and the white water flashed inboards through the scupper-holes wherever the vessel buried her lee side. At the far end of the poop was the helmsman, sharply rising and falling against the whirling soot of the sky. The officer of the watch, clothed in oilskins, stood grasping a stay near a quarter-boat. A single sentry stood at the head of the poop ladder. The poor fellow was sodden, and seemed withered by the ceaseless pouring of the blast. One cannot but feel sorry for soldiers at sea. The forecastle sentry looked equally wretched. Those on the main deck were in some degree sheltered by the weather bulwarks. A strange smell of cattle, hay, poultry, and pigs, came from the long-boat, within and under which the live-stock were stowed. A dismal, wet, roaring, frost-cold picture. The melancholy horror of it is upon my spirits as I

talk to you, and yet this was but the first week of what might prove a passage of months.

I heard the boatswain's voice of thunder giving orders to some seamen on the other side of the galley. Presently he came round to my side of the deck, and on seeing me called out, 'I've got some o' your property. The chief mate says I'm to hand it over to you. Here's the handkerchief,' said he. 'There was two pipes. Well, I can't return 'em because they're broke. Here's yer tinder-box and arrangement, and a pretty contrivance it is. When I get ashore I shall ask my young woman to make me a present of such another.'

'You are very welcome to it, Mr. Balls.'

'Say you so? Smite me if I haven't been swearing you was a gentleman born and bred ever since I first lugged you out of the t'garns'l. Well, I'm truly obliged. As pretty a little——' and he walked off, talking aloud as he looked at the tinder-box.

I heard the cook speaking with great excitement to his mate, and guessed that I should do well to keep quiet until he told me

that he was ready. A few minutes later a soldier's wife rose through the hatch near the cuddy-front—they called it the booby-hatch—and came forward. She had a shawl over her head, and was bringing a pudding to the cook to be baked. A sudden heave of the ship drove her against the lee bulwarks. I went to her help, took the dish from her, and put it into her hands again when we had reached the galley. She was the pretty young wife who had before taken notice of me with smiles. The cook spoke insolently to her—asked her if she thought he'd shipped to do nothing but look after such small mucking jobs of barracks pastry as that there. He wasn't 'no blushen' soldiers' cook.' If it depended upon him there'd be no army. 'What! Keep a scaldin' lot o' gutterpeckers in money, good wittles, and fine clothes at the expense of the nation, whose sailors has to do all the real fighting when it comes to it?' He said much in this way, shouting loudly, and sticking and thrusting and gesticulating with a long, dangerous-looking fork used for bringing up the meat out of the coppers. The

woman threatened to fetch the sergeant. The cook, with a horrid laugh, begged her to lose no time. His coppers were ready, he said, and he'd warrant the sergeant boiled to a turn before four bells. After more of this Mr. Cook took the dish from the woman, eyed and smelled it, with a sarcastic leer, and requested the woman to clear out.

She stood at my side, breathing short, and very angry and flushed, and said if she told her husband of the cook's behaviour he would kill him. I advised her to take no notice of the fellow. All sea cooks in a gale of wind were bad-tempered to a proverb. They had much to put up with. Only think of being forced to cook in a kitchen that was continually rolling about, saucepans sliding, sea-water bursting in, hungry sailors, with knives in their hands, full of threats and oaths if time was not punctually kept. I put the case humorously, and she began to laugh and to peep at me with her bright eyes.

She asked me what I waited for, and, one thing leading to another, she seemed in no hurry to quit me. And, indeed, we stood

very snug, warm, and sheltered under the lee of the galley. We got upon the subject of the quarters below.

‘What sort of barracks have you?’ said I.

‘Come down and see them when you can,’ said she.

‘Whom must I apply to for permission?’ said I.

‘You’ll want no permission, I believe,’ she answered. ‘You belong to the ship. But I’ll speak to my husband, and the sergeant’ll make no difficulty.’

‘I should like to see the convicts’ quarters,’ said I.

‘You’ll be able to get a peep at them through the door in the steerage bulkhead. I may be able to manage that for you, too,’ said she. ‘Dick has sentry there for some time to-day. If you’ll stop here, I’ll find out at once, and come back and tell you the hour.’

I thanked her, earnestly hoping that the hour would fit in with my duties. Before she returned the cook was ready for me. I went toward the cuddy, and as I passed the booby-hatch the soldier’s wife came up.

‘You’re welcome to step below whenever you please,’ said she. ‘The sergeant’s got an eye upon you and wants to ‘list you,’ she added, laughing. ‘And a sweet young soldier you’d make—a heart-breaker, indeed,’ said she, looking at me with a shake of the head. ‘Dick’s on sentry at twelve. If that’ll suit, come then. He’ll take no notice whilst you look.’

Twelve was the very hour I would have named. It was my dinner-hour, and I had a clear half hour at the very least before helping to prepare the cuddy luncheon. When eight bells struck I came to the hatch, but warily. The doctor was talking to the captain at the after-end of the cuddy, and I did not mean that either of them should see where I was going. It still blew hard, and was very thick, and the officers were unable to get an observation of the sun. I stooped, that the two men in the cuddy might lose sight of me. By the looks of the sentry at the quarter-deck barricade I guessed he knew that I was going to pay his quarters a visit, and that it was all right. But I cared not who saw me descend

unless it were the officers of the ship and guard.

I put my foot over and easily went down an almost perpendicular ladder. I found myself in a somewhat strange interior. On the right, or starboard, hand was a long cabin, which Will afterwards told me had been designed for a midshipman's berth. This cabin was occupied by the unmarried soldiers. On the left-hand side were a number of rough whitewood cabins, rudely erected—such cabins as are put together for the use of poor emigrants. The married couples and children slept in them. Light descended through the booby-hatch, but the day was very scowling, as you know, and it needed some use to see well. A couple of tables were cleated athwartships, and two or three of the women were preparing them for dinner. A few soldiers were sitting about reading or talking. In one of the berths a baby was crying loudly, and several children sat in a group in a corner playing.

The good-looking young wife came from some part of these quarters, or barracks, as I descended. She showed me a married couple's

sleeping-berth, and bade me, as I was a young man, put my head boldly into the single men's cabin and not mind them. I seemed to look, but in truth I had no eyes but for the strong, gloomy, prison-like bulkhead which served as the afterwall of the convicts' prison. This bulkhead stretched from side to side. It was studded with iron knobs, mushroom-shaped. A number of holes were bored in it—perhaps twenty. I knew the object of those holes. They were intended to receive the muzzles of muskets, so that a volley of twenty muskets could be fired at once into the throng of convicts confined below in case of an uprising or other tragic trouble. I also observed what resembled a disk in the centre of this barricade, somewhat low down. I asked the woman what it meant. She inquired of a soldier, who answered that it had been a hole to receive the muzzle of a cannon, but that the orifice had been stopped.

‘It's handy to command with grape and canister in case of a difficulty,’ said the soldier, speaking with an Irish accent. ‘A great gun, loaded to the muzzle, is the right way to keep

an oye upon such lads as thim yonder. 'Tis wan of them oyes that never winks nor slapes.'

On the right of the barricade was the door, where stood the sentry—the 'Dick' of my pretty companion. I had supposed that the main hatch was the only means of entering the 'tweendecks; but this afterdoor, it seems, was always used by the doctor for going his rounds.

'Tell him to look and be quick, Jane,' said the sentry.

'Clap your eye to a hole,' said the young woman. 'Dick dursn't open the door for you.'

I did so, and saw almost as much as if the sentry had opened the door. The light was faint and dim; such daylight as there was hung round about the main hatch where the stanchions came down from the sides of the hatch in the form of a gigantic square bird-cage. There were no scuttles or portholes, no skylights for the admission of light or air overhead. The place seemed full of men, shadowy heaps of them, with a number of dim shapes in motion, giving a look of wild,

unnatural vitality to such of the ghostly mob as sat and were at rest.

The soldier's wife put her eye to a loop-hole beside mine. I asked her what those restless figures were about, and she answered they were messmen and mess helpers preparing for the convicts' dinner by half-past twelve. A double tier of sleeping shelves divided into compartments, each wide enough to accommodate several men sleeping side by side, ran the whole length on either hand of these 'tweendecks. I heard a subdued growl of voices and the frequent clank of irons, but high above all sounded the ceaseless straining and crazy complaining of the numerous bulk-heads which went to the equipment of the ship in this part.

Far forward on the left was a sort of cabin; I knew it was the prison by Will's description. The hospital lay in this end, and I could not see it. The air was fairly sweet and fresh where I stood, owing to the booby-hatch lying wide open, protected as it was by the cuddy recess; but I seemed to fancy a dreadful oppression and closeness of

atmosphere in those 'tweendecks where the many shadowy shapes were herded. Which of all those spectral figures was Tom? Oh, my heart! To think of him in his innocence, ironed, entombed in that close and dimly-lighted prison, forced to lie of a night, side by side with felons, obliged to listen to their hideous talk, to their boasts of past crimes, to their threats of darker villainies yet, when the moment should come to free their hand.

'Now, Jane, your friend must be off,' said the sentry, 'or the doctor'll be coming along.'

I nodded civilly to him, thanked his pretty wife, and went on deck. I was half mad with grief and passion. The reality had far exceeded my imagination of the wretchedness and horror of the prisoners' quarters. I believe I should have been less shocked had I passed into the 'tweendecks by way of the main hatch; but it was like taking a view of some nightmare imagination of human misery to peer through the loophole into that tossing, straining, and groaning interior, dimly touched with daylight in the centre, faintly irradiated

by lantern-light in other parts, the whole strange shadow of it thickened and jumbled by the scarcely determinable shapes of men sitting, standing, moving, the clank of irons coming from them, and the low growl of speech.

I went about my work as usual, helped at the luncheon-table, exchanged sentences with Frank, cleaned and polished as was now my business ; but all the while I was secretly raging with sorrow and temper. I was asking myself : Is it not in my power to release Tom from this horrible hell ? Have I not the wit to devise a scheme for giving him his liberty ? They may flog me, they may hang me if they will ; let me but enable Tom to get away from that loathsome jail below, and they may do what they will. Twenty fancies occurred to me. I thought of my cousin Will assisting me to secrete my sweetheart in some part of the ship, as I had lain hidden, where I should be able to feed him and where he would lie until the ship's arrival ! Then I thought of his escaping in a quarter-boat which I would secretly provision for him ! But why pursue

the catalogue of these ridiculous dreams? They were a girl's passionate, ignorant fancies, born of despair and wrath. In some of my fancies I was as wicked as the worst of the wretches below. I would have sacrificed every life on board, including my own, to procure Tom's liberty, to free him from the horrors the unjust hand of the law had heaped upon him. I would have set fire to the ship, I would have gnawed a hole in her bottom as patiently as a rat's tooth penetrates a plank, if by burning, if by sinking, the vessel I could have liberated my sweetheart.

But I cooled down by degrees. Indeed, this morning the steward kept me running about, and I could only think in snatches; so that meditation was thin and brief, and its influence light and passing.

During the afternoon, some considerable time before sunset, the wind shifted, the sky cleared, and we had fine weather. Sail was made on the ship. The sea ran in a strong, dark-blue swell, which shouldered the sunshine from brow to brow, and filled the ocean in the south-west with a roving splendour. Two or

three white sails of ships showed upon the horizon. I supposed that by this time we had been blown some distance out of the Bay of Biscay. Certainly our course had been straight and our speed thunderous during the past dark days of storm.

Shortly after the weather cleared the convicts were ordered on deck. I stood in the cuddy door to see them assemble. They came up one by one, and were massed in lines close to the barricade, with their faces turned toward the poop. I supposed they had been disciplined aboard the hulk. The convict 'captains' and felon overseers found no difficulty in marshalling them. The men fell in as though they had been soldiers, wheeling about and taking up their positions whilst the decks rang with short, sharp cries of command and the tramp of ironed feet. I took a step on to the quarter-deck and looked up at the break of the poop, and there saw the doctor, with Captain Sutherland by his side. The officers of the guard were at the rail, and behind stood a number of the guard under arms. As the barricade obstructed my sight, and

as I was determined to see what was going on, I picked up a tray and went down the port gangway alley, as though I had business at the galley. The yards were braced somewhat forward, and I stood close to the great maintack, which sheltered me from the sight of the poop. Here I could observe without being seen. Unhappily, my position brought the backs of the convicts upon me. Tom was not to be distinguished among that throng of closely packed felons. A few were in the hospital; two or three in the prison. There might be two hundred and twenty men gathered together behind the barricade—all facing aft—their faces upturned to the doctor.

His purpose in assembling them was to deliver a lecture. He spoke loudly and with earnestness, but seemed to have no sense whatever of irony. It was strange that a person of his experience should not guess that the greater part of his discourse would be listened to with the tongue in the cheek. He talked to the convicts as though they had been a congregation of respectable worshippers, people who led an honest life in their

trades and houses six days, and on the seventh attended church, instead of a body of men of whom two-thirds were hardened scoundrels—seasoned, stewed, salted down in crime; miscreants who would return to their old villainies, and to viler villainies yet, the instant they were at large, if the country they found themselves in provided them with the chances they wanted.

I remember he told them they were one large family, and that the opportunities during the voyage of exercising the best and kindest feelings would be ample. Every one was to prefer his brother to himself. They were not only to be careful of each other's comforts, but to be kindly watchful over each other's speech and behaviour. 'I forbid,' said he, 'the use of all irritating or provoking speech or gestures in your intercourse with each other, the employment of all vulgar epithets and unmanly nicknames, the use of which always indicates a low and undisciplined mind.' I listened for a general laugh when he pointed out the necessity for convicts cultivating a humble, meek, and gentle spirit—submissive, con-

tented, and thankful; of their ever remembering the injury they had inflicted on their country, and particularly the expense to which they had put the Government !

The prisoners swayed with the movements of the deck. They all seemed to listen with attention to the doctor's discourse, but then any man will appear to listen with attention to the speech of another who has it in his power to flog him for not doing so. It was a strange scene, familiar enough in those days, never more by any possibility to be beheld again. On high spread the canvas in cloud upon cloud, swelling to the western brightness; soft masses of vapour rolled stately under a sky of deep, liquid blue; the swaying mass of convicts in the sickly hue of their prison dress, their irons like a chain cable stretching the length of the planks, half filled the barricade inclosure; at the brass rail above stood the doctor, flourishing his hand whilst he addressed them, and the listeners beside him were thrown out strong upon the eye by the red line of soldiers standing close behind. A pause seemed to fall upon the ship;

the sailors dropped their work to stare and hearken ; the second mate and the apprentices strained their gaze from the lee side of the poop at the rows of faces ; far aft was the helmsman, stretching his neck and turning his head on one side and then on the other, as though to hear what the doctor said.

‘The youngest amongst you now,’ continued the doctor, ‘in some measure understand that it is in the strictest sense a moral discipline which I desire to see in operation on board this transport. In further proof of which I shall give orders that those irons—the badges of your disgrace—with which you are at present fettered, be removed from the whole of you ; and I do most ardently hope that when I have once caused them to be struck off, you will not by your conduct demand of their being again replaced ; for what can be more disgraceful to you and painful to me than the clanking of those irons as you walk along the decks ?’

The address lasted about three-quarters of an hour. Captain Barrett replaced and let fall his eye-glass with impatience. A number

of the convicts were now sent below, to return presently, as I supposed, when the others should have taken their allowance of exercise. I dared not linger, and walked slowly aft, sending searching looks at the prisoners, though I did not see Tom. How was I to deliver my letter? But it chanced that I had sight of many strange faces. A gang of prisoners passed close as I went toward the cuddy; a few were grey-haired men, bowed and wrinkled; some were young, and I marked that all these had defiant looks. One countenance, quickly as it passed, impressed me strongly; the man had fine, large, black, flashing eyes, and was a handsome, dark person, half a head taller than those who trudged near him; he held himself erect, and I seemed to notice a sort of theatrical air in his strides spite of the irons. I had heard someone say there was an actor among the felons, and I guessed that man was he.

CHAPTER XXIV

SHE ALARMS HER COUSIN

AT the dinner-table that day most of the talk I caught concerned the convicts and the Australian settlements. Captain Barrett told the doctor that he considered his address to the prisoners deuced fine. The doctor bowed.

‘What makes criminals, sir?’ asked Captain Sutherland.

‘The dislike of honest labour,’ answered the doctor.

‘It’s the mothers who make the criminals,’ said the lieutenant.

The doctor viewed him sternly. I do not think he loved these discussions.

‘Don’t the magnetic character of an iron ship depend upon the direction of her head while building?’ said the lieutenant.

‘I have seen but one iron ship, sir,’ said Captain Sutherland.

‘Well,’ continued the lieutenant, ‘it’s so with the baby before birth: the mother may choose her own compass bearings for the child—virtue or vice, as may be. ’Tis the mother has the building of the bairn, look you, Ellice. If she don’t go right whilst the bairn’s putting together, be sorry for the little ’un. He’s booked in irons and a gray suit for a shiny land.’

‘Fudge,’ said the doctor.

The captain, however, seemed impressed by the lieutenant’s opinion, and continued to look at him.

‘Did you ever have charge of an uglier lot, Ellice?’ asked Captain Barrett.

‘I don’t recognise human ugliness,’ answered the doctor. ‘Is the egg bad? That’s it; never mind the look and colour of the shell.’

‘What becomes of a convict when he dies?’ said the lieutenant.

‘What becomes of the ripple when it breaks upon the shore?’ answered Captain Sutherland.

‘Do convicts really stand any chance out

in the colonies, do you think?' said the lieutenant.

'An excellent chance,' said the doctor.

'Too good a chance!' exclaimed Captain Sutherland.

I pricked my ears. I was then at the end of the cuddy waiting till the gentlemen should have done with certain dishes which it would be my business to carry forward.

'How is a rogue to establish himself?' asked Lieutenant Chimmo.

'There's plenty to be done,' answered the doctor. 'Labour is always in demand. When a man is on ticket-of-leave he may live where he pleases.'

'They are much better used than our labourers at home,' said Captain Sutherland.

'What about the chain-gangs?' exclaimed Captain Barrett.

'The chain-gang is punishment,' said the doctor. 'It is hard work, but not harder than the toil of many an honest man at home for a famishing wage. Not harder than the labours of a French fishwife, for example.'

'I would rather work in a chain-gang

than dig in a coal mine,' said Captain Sutherland.

'A convict's hired out as a servant by the Government to the applicant, isn't he?' said Captain Barrett.

'Yes. You must be a landholder if you apply. I'm speaking of New South Wales,' answered the doctor. 'You must hold three hundred and twenty acres for every one convict you get. Seventy-five convicts are the limit. No man may have more.'

'Should you feel happy, Barrett,' said Lieutenant Chimmo, 'to be waited on and generally done for by seventy-five of the gentry in our 'tweendecks? How would you like to be shaved by a cracksman, tucked up every night by an incendiary, cooked for by a chemist lagged for a trifling blunder in the shape of strychnia, waited on behind your chair, you know, by a gent who has been spun for digging up bodies?'

'Are the convicts decently well fed out in the settlements?' inquired Captain Barrett.

'Yes. The hirer's obliged to give his man plenty to eat. He's made to sign a bond,'

responded the doctor. 'The convicts feed on beef, mutton, and pork, and they get wheat and maize meal; their clothes are two jackets and two pairs of trousers a year, shoes and shirts, and a mattress and blankets besides.'

Just then the steward motioned to me, and I was sent out of the cuddy.

This talk made me very thoughtful. I went about my work as full of reflection as though I had been planning a poem. What was the cost of land by the acre in Tasmania? If I purchased three hundred and twenty acres in that country, would they give me Tom for a servant? Or, suppose Tom should be hired before I qualified for a landholder, for I was without a friend in Tasmania and months must pass before I could receive money from England, should I be able to bribe his employer into parting with him? My spirits mounted with my fancies. The doctor knew what he was talking about, and in imagination I beheld myself the owner of a little estate in Tasmania with Tom by my side, and our home as happy as love could make it.

In the first dog watch that evening I had an hour to myself. The wind was mild and sweet, and the sea ran in soft folds. Frank had told me that the ship was many miles to the south of the Bay of Biscay, and that if our course was to be shaped east we should bring Gibraltar over the bow.

This young German joined me whilst I stood near the cuddy door, and asked me to smoke a pipe. I said that my pipes had been broken for me by the boatswain. He offered to lend me a pipe. I told him that the ship's tobacco was too strong for my taste, that I was never much of a smoker, and then changed the subject, but watched him whilst he talked; conscience made me afraid; then again, I was much thrown with this young man who, though an insipid German, was not wholly a fool: it was impossible to say what little hints or tricks of my sex he might have observed.

I was made uneasier still later on, when Lieutenant Chimmo stepped through the cuddy-door with a cigar in his mouth; he was passing, then paused and stood puffing and looking at me without taking the least

notice of the German steward. I was nearly as tall as this subaltern.

‘Are you an only child?’ said he.

I stared at him, and in that instant meant not to answer; changed my mind, and answered: ‘Yes, sir.’

‘A pity!’ said he. ‘If you had a sister and she resembled you, she would be——’ He glanced at Frank, who was grinning, checked his speech with a face of contempt, and addressing me again, exclaimed: ‘I hear they are gradually making discoveries about you!’

This startled me, and I may have looked at him earnestly.

‘Oh,’ said he, smiling, ‘nothing’s been found out that’s going to bring you into trouble; on the contrary, you prove much more respectable than you seemed to wish us to believe, when you were dug up out of that hole forward. Your father was a sea captain—the sea is a very honest calling. But why should you run away from your home to become a cuddy under-steward? There’s no ambition in that, my lad, is there?’ He cast another look of contempt at Frank. ‘Unless,

indeed, you were for carrying out the old-established notions of the story-writers who are always sending their runaway heroes to sea as cabin-boys.'

At this moment, Captain Barrett, who was on the poop, overhearing the subaltern's voice, called to him, and Lieutenant Chimmo went up the ladder.

'I should like to be talked about as you are,' said Frank. 'Dot means dey know you vhas a shentleman. You vill find dot dey do not talk about me. I fonder dot they doan give you some verk your little handts vhas more fit for dan vashing plates.'

'I wish they would not talk about me,' said I. 'I am comfortable and content. I wish to travel to Tasmania in my own way. I earn my food. I shan't receive a shilling for my services. Why will they talk?'

'Dere vhas something about you, Marlowe,' said Frank, 'dot oxcites and puzzles them. She oxcites and puzzles me too. What vhas it? Potsblitz ! I likes to talk about you myself if I meets mit any one dot vill talk about you likewise.'

He was proceeding in this strain when my cousin Will came along the gangway alley. All the convicts were below at supper. Nobody was on the main-deck but the sentry at the hatch. A number of seamen were assembled on the forecastle, and amongst them were a few of the guard. At the break of that raised fore-deck stalked the sentinel, and his bayonet gleamed in the sun as though wet with blood.

‘Marlowe,’ said my cousin, halting at a distance, ‘come forward and I’ll give you the things I promised you.’

And having said this he walked away as though he had condescended enough. And he was wise to treat me so, for on stepping out of the recess and turning my head I saw the captain and the doctor and the two officers of the guard standing at the rail in conversation.

I followed my cousin to his cabin. He had entered before me, and when I arrived I found him alone.

‘I shan’t call you Marian any more,’ said he. ‘Suppose I should be overheard? And

I'll not call you Simon either. Why didn't you ship as Jack or Bill? Take now what you want, and when you have shifted give me your soiled clothes and I'll get them washed.'

He raised the lid of his chest, and I took a flannel shirt and such other apparel as I needed.

'You'll find that pilot coat melting wear a few degrees further south,' said he. 'Here's a serge jacket. Will it fit you?'

I put it on, then rolled the clothes into a bundle and stayed to talk.

'Will, does anyone on board suspect I'm a woman?'

'I don't know of any one,' he answered; 'what's put that into your head?'

'Nothing. I don't want to be found out. Depend upon it, if the doctor and the others discovered that I was a girl, they'd suspect me of some desperate purpose and send me out of the ship at the first chance.'

'That's likely,' said Will, cutting up a piece of tobacco to fill his pipe with; 'but who'd imagine you're a girl? You walk like a man and begin to roll about like a sailor.'

You lug your basket of foul dishes forward in true bottle-washer fashion.'

'Not so loud,' said I, looking toward the door.

'I've heard nothing about you for'ard,' he continued. 'They occasionally talk of you aft. I catch scraps of speech as the skipper and the others stump the poop. I heard that fellow, Captain Barrett, say that he notices you take a great interest in all talk at table that concerns the convicts. I'd wear a deaf face in the cuddy, if I were you.'

'I'll do so. That Captain Barrett's right. The hint won't be lost, I assure you,' said I, looking at myself in a square of glass and observing by the strong red light that my complexion had been something darkened already by my frequent exposure on deck, though it was still too soft and delicate a skin to please me. 'But,' said I, speaking low, 'I shan't greatly heed any suspicions that don't touch my sex.'

'Have you seen anything more of Butler?' he asked, also speaking low.

I shook my head with a sigh, and, pulling the letter from my pocket, told him how long it had been written, and that I had found no chance of delivering it.

‘Now mind how you attempt to deliver it!’ he exclaimed. ‘If the sentry sees you giving it to him, say good night to your projects, for they’ll find out you’re a woman, and lock you up for examination and punishment on your arrival. They’re hideously in earnest in these ships. And take care that you don’t get Tom flogged.’

This talk frightened and angered me too. I took several turns up and down the little berth, whilst he smoked and watched me, and then said: ‘I must risk it. Tom shall get this letter, and then I’ll be satisfied.’

‘If the third mate could be trusted,’ said he, ‘it might be contrived without risk. He serves out stores to the convicts, and Butler’s one of the gang who fetches the stuff. I heard the third mate tell Mr. Bates that. Bates takes a good deal of interest in Butler. It was only yesterday he was talking to the

captain, and I heard him say he considered Butler an injured man.'

' "Injured!" ' I cried, scornful of that meek word.

' But the third mate mustn't be trusted, so there's an end.'

I looked at Will steadily, and said in a soft voice: ' Isn't Tom to be freed? '

' "Freed?" ' he echoed.

' Got out of the ship? '

' How? '

' You're the sailor, Will. How would you go to work to enable an innocent man to escape from a convict ship? '

' How would I go to work? ' He paused with his mouth open and the hand which held his pipe arrested midway. ' How would I go to work? I'd tell him to jump overboard, or I'd slip a knife into his hand that he might cut his throat. What other way? Escape! Escape from a convict ship on the high seas! With loaded muskets ready to make eyelets in a man's head at any moment in the night or day, with look-outs for'ard and look-outs aft, and a sentry below with a bayonet fixed

for the first. Now, see here,' said he, growing pale and putting his pipe down, 'if you talk like that, if you allow any fancy of helping Tom to escape to enter your head, then, to save you from God alone knows what consequences, I'll go right aft to the skipper and make a clean breast of it.'

'I don't say that it is to be done,' said I, vexed that I should have so agitated him, 'but is there any harm in talking, Will?'

'Yes, in talking of such things as that. You are madly in love with Butler, and your notions and your dreams of helping him are mad. Haven't you made sacrifice enough for the man? Do you want to become a felon too? That won't help him.'

'What could I do that you should talk to me like this?' said I, reddening and staring at him in my old fiery way.

'You could do nothing,' he answered, 'and that's just it. But you can talk and you might attempt, and I'll blow the gaff, so help me God, if you don't give me your word.'

He was as red as I, and his face worked with consternation and anger.

‘I give you my word,’ I exclaimed, and took him in my arms and kissed him on either cheek.

The boy was deeply moved and almost crying. Just then an apprentice came into the berth, on which, in a changed voice, I thanked Will for his kindness, picked up my bundle, and walked aft.

My talk had so deeply scared my cousin that he took an opportunity before that evening was gone of again speaking to me. He implored me not to believe for an instant that Tom could escape out of this ship at sea. ‘You can’t help him,’ said he. ‘But what might happen to you? The punishment for helping a convict to escape is fearfully heavy. They’d try you at some Tasmanian court of justice and make a felon of you. You’d be a female convict, associating with the vilest of the vile of your own sex. Why, sooner than such a thing should happen, I’d go straight to the skipper and tell him who you are!’

I answered with a hot face and angry eyes that if I could help Tom to escape, they might do what they liked afterwards—mangle me,

crucify me, bury me alive. 'But what is the good of talking?' I said. 'I know there is nothing to be done. Don't tell me I love Tom as if I were a mad woman. It maddens me to hear that said. I love him as sanely as your father loves your mother. I love him loyally and with all my heart. We were to have been married, and, before God, we are married, and who shall hinder me from fulfilling my unspoken marriage vow to abandon everybody and cleave only to my love?' Here a great sob interrupted me, but I fought with my tears and after a little struggling pause I continued: 'I will do nothing rash, Will. Be easy, dear heart. I would help Tom to escape this night if I could, but I cannot; I can do nothing: so rest your peace of mind on that.'

CHAPTER XXV

SHE DELIVERS HER LETTER, AND SEES A CONVICT
PUNISHED

NEXT morning on coming into the cuddy from my berth and looking through the door, I saw a number of convicts washing the decks down. Some were on the forecastle, some in the barricaded inclosure, and three or four were scrubbing the quarter-deck close beside the cuddy front. Every morning small gangs of the felons helped the sailors to wash down, whilst numbers below scrubbed their own quarters out. The boatswain and his mates and the captains of the gangs superintended, hurled the water along the decks out of the buckets handed to them, and kept the men to their work. It was a very fine morning; the wind was on the quarter, and the second mate overhead was calling to some hands aloft who were rigging out booms for the setting of

those wide overhanging wings of canvas called 'studding-sails.'

I immediately observed that the convicts were without irons. What with the soldiers, the prisoners, the sailors scrubbing or preparing to run the studding-sails aloft; what with the flashing of the sun on the wet decks, the pendulum swing of the straight-lined shadows of the rigging, the blowing of smoke from the two galley chimneys, combined with the sense of life in the noises of people scrubbing the poop overhead, of the bleating of sheep forward, the crowing of cocks, the grunting of a sow, the clanking of the head and poop pumps, the ceaseless gushing of water—the scene was one of such life and motion as forbade me for a little while from distinguishing.

I looked eagerly for Tom. The steward called to me sharply and angrily, after which I was for half an hour occupied with Frank in cleaning down the cuddy, without a single opportunity to turn my eyes toward the main deck. When this odious task was ended, Mr.

Stiles gave me a piece of raw bacon to carry to the cook for the cuddy breakfast.

I took care to hold the letter in the palm of my hand, in the hope that I should meet Tom as I went or returned. A batch of about fifty convicts, stripped to the waist, were washing themselves on the port side of the main deck, close against the barricade of the gangway alley. The doctor stood, viewing them, at a little distance. Two or three 'captains' walked to and fro, to observe that the men washed themselves properly. Seeing no other convicts on deck, I went along the gangway alley, and with my head straight, but with my eyes in the corner that the doctor might not detect my scrutiny, I narrowly viewed the convicts as I stepped forward, but Tom was not of that gang.

On coming, however, abreast of the prisoners' galley, I saw my sweetheart inside. I did not notice what he was about. No doubt he had been told off to help the cooks that morning, or maybe he was there on some errand relating to his mess. Be this as it may, I saw him in an instant, and formed my

resolution in a single beat of my heart. I coughed. The note of my cough made him turn his head. Even whilst our eyes met I entered the galley in which he stood.

‘Here, cook,’ said I, ‘the steward says——’ I started as though I had discovered my error. ‘I beg pardon for mistaking the galley,’ said I, and in turning, as though to leave, I purposely struck my foot against the coaming of the door, fell a step backward, and let fall the dish and the bacon. The dish was of tin; had it been crockery I should have let it fall all the same, though the noise of the breakage might have brought the doctor to the door. Tom stooped to pick up the bacon; our fingers touched, and I slipped the letter into his hand.

This was admirably done; the swiftness of the manœuvre renders it one of the most memorable of my exploits in this way. I had feared that Tom would not understand in time to render the trick successful, but the moment he felt the letter his hand closed upon it. I did not look at him or attempt to breathe a syllable, though our faces were close when we

stooped. I could not tell who besides Tom was in that galley : there were several persons, convicts no doubt, men whose behaviour in the hulks had warranted the doctor in giving them posts of some little consequence and trust. All had happened so quickly, that I could not say whether the others besides Tom were clothed as felons or not.

die I think This convicts' galley, I should explain, was a temporary deck structure, built strongly abaft the ship's galley, furnished with an abundant cooking apparatus, as you may suppose would be needed for the feeding of two hundred and thirty souls. None of the crew were suffered to enter it ; it was sentinelled by convict warders or captains only. It was inspected every day by the doctor, and closed and locked when the convicts' supper had been handed along.

I came out of the ship's galley with a rejoicing heart, and peeped at the door of the other as I passed, but Tom was not in sight. However, he now had my letter ; no risk had been run, not the most suspicious mind, not the most vigilant eye in the ship, could have

imagined or detected what had passed between my sweetheart and me. My spirits were in a dance ; for my letter would tell him as much—as much to the point, I mean—as my lips could have uttered in a half-hour's meeting. I figured his impatience to read it, the glow of hope and pleasure that would warm his poor, dear heart as he read, the courage and support he would get out of it.

‘ You vhas light-hearted this morning,’ said Frank to me, as we helped the steward to prepare the breakfast-table. ‘ Dere vhas no twopenny postman at sea, or I should say dot you hov’ received some goodt news.’

‘ It is the weather,’ I answered ; ‘ and then a young apprentice has kindly given me a clean flannel shirt to wear.’

‘ Who’s the apprentice?’ exclaimed Mr. Stiles, who overheard me.

‘ Mr. Johnstone,’ I answered.

‘ Picked him up aboard, or did yer know him before you stowed yourself away?’

‘ My father was a client of his father’s,’ I replied.

‘Wither me if it ain’t a-coming stronger and stronger with you every day!’ exclaimed Mr. Stiles. ‘What are you going to turn out afore you’re done?’ he added, stopping in his work to look at me.

‘I tell you vhat it vhas, sir,’ said Frank. ‘Dis vhas no ordinary shentleman. Dis vhas a young nobleman in disguise.’

‘Hold your yaw-yawing!’ cried the steward. ‘Who’s a-talking to you? You’re always a-putting in, you are, and a-stopping the work.’

The cuddy breakfast-bell was rung, and at half-past eight the captain and officers seated themselves. I received a sort of nod from Lieutenant Chimmo, and Captain Barrett looked at me pleasantly. Both men suggested that they regarded me as coming near to their social level. This was odd, for, as a rule, people rather shrink from and give the cold shoulder to gentle-folks who have been sunk by fortune into getting their bread in mean positions such as mine was on board that ship. Captain Sutherland never heeded me, but sometimes I thought the doctor’s stern eyes

rested upon me with an expression of inquiry. The cuddy was full of sunlight ; the glory of the morning sparkled in glass and crystal and plate, and the radiance was made lovely by the soft atmospheric azure tint which floated into it off the blue sea.

‘ When do you start your school, doctor ? ’ said Captain Barrett.

‘ On Monday,’ was the answer.

‘ Captain,’ said Lieutenant Chimmo, addressing the commander of the ship, ‘ did you see Barney Abram washing himself this morning ? What a chest ! What arms ! Cut his head and legs off, fossilise what’s left, chuck the torso into the Tiber, and when dredged up it would be sworn to as the most magnificent fragment of ancient art in the wide world.’

‘ A pity, Ellice,’ said Captain Barrett, ‘ that you object to Barney stepping aft occasionally to give Chimmo and me a few tips in the grandest of all sciences.’

‘ The most degrading, sir,’ said the doctor. ‘ I am surprised that you should think proper to repeat the request.’

‘The voyage is a doocid long one,’ murmured Captain Barrett.

‘Isn’t there to be some punishment this morning?’ asked Captain Sutherland.

‘A little light punishment,’ answered the doctor—‘two hours of the box.’

‘You don’t believe in the cat, sir?’ said Captain Barrett.

‘I do not,’ answered the doctor.

‘I believed in the cat until pickling went out of fashion,’ said the subaltern. ‘A man who had been salted down whilst bleeding seldom courted a second dose; but now I understand your man-of-war’s man thinks so lightly of flogging that he would rather take three dozen than forfeit a day’s allowance of grog.’

‘I’m no lover of the cat myself,’ said Captain Sutherland, ‘but it’s good discipline. It’s a degrading punishment, very proper for degraded men. I have some men forward who deserve whipping, and whipping, perhaps, isn’t enough for them; nor would pickling suffice. They want quartering. The Government forces us commanders of hired

transports to fill our fore-castle with a given number of hands. No questions are asked. So long as your complement numerically corresponds with the Government requirement, all's supposed to be right. Now, what sort of a crew did the crimp scramble together for me that my muster might answer to the Admiralty wants? I've about six seamen qualified to steer. I doubt if there are ten men forward who know how to send down a yard. But one has to take what one can get. The crimp comes along and throws a gutter-brood aboard; some are not fit even as shilling-a-monthers, and have bribed the crimp to the pawning of their only shirt to ship them, that they may get abroad, where they'll run.'

'I don't like the looks of a good many of your men,' said the doctor.

'But you could muster strongly enough for an emergency, captain?' said the subaltern.

'What do you mean by an emergency?' said Captain Sutherland.

'A heavy squall of wind, sir, and the ship aback with royals set.'

‘Where the deuce did you pick up your nautical knowledge, Chimmo?’ said Captain Barrett.

‘Is that an emergency, captain?’ asked the subaltern.

‘Oh, I’ve no doubt we could manage, I’ve no doubt we could manage,’ answered the captain, with something of gloomy impatience.

Here I was dispatched to the pantry, and when I returned after a considerable interval the gentlemen had gone on deck.

As Tom was always in my mind when any sort of reference was made to the convicts, I was very eager and anxious to know what the punishment of the box was—to speak of it as the doctor had—and who was the culprit. A number of prisoners were assembled between the barricades, whether employed or not I do not recollect. The steward had gone forward, in all probability to smoke a pipe with the cook, under pretence of talking about the cabin dinner. I stood in the cuddy doorway viewing the prisoners, yearning for a sight of Tom, that by a swift look or smile he might let me know he had read my letter.

An apprentice struck four bells—ten o'clock. The doctor came up from the prisoners' quarters followed by Captain Barrett and the sergeant of the guard, and the three of them stood under the break of the poop, near enough for me to overhear them, though they could not see me.

Scarcely had the bell struck when a convict in irons passed out of the main hatch. Two convict warders were with him and each, grasping an arm, marched him to that sort of sentry box which I have before described—a contrivance of about the width of a coffin and a trifle longer or higher, with a bucket hanging from a bar over it. The convict struggled angrily, and I guessed by the faces of those who were near enough for me to read that he cursed and swore very vilely, but only now and then did I catch an oath. A man stepped forward and threw open the front of the coffin-like structure, then helped the others to twist the prisoner with his face looking inboards, and when they had put him into this posture they thrust him backwards into the box and shut him up.

He was a young fellow of about twenty-two, with the wickedest face of any man's in the ship. A grinning, wrinkled seaman stood beside the box holding the rope that was attached to the bucket. Another seaman was near, and beside him were four or five buckets of water.

'He's a profane rascal, and I have no hopes of him,' I heard the doctor say.

'Why not flog him?' said Captain Barrett.

'It may come to it, but I trust not.'

Meanwhile the prisoner in the box was bawling at the top of his voice and doubtless using horrid language. I observed that the wrinkled, grinning seaman watched the doctor, who, after a few minutes' pause, lifted his hand as a signal, whereupon the sailor pulled the rope and tilted the bucket, and the water fell in a heavy splash upon the blaspheming youth boxed up inside.

Captain Barrett gave a great laugh. Indeed, a noise of laughter ran through the ship. A number of sailors, who had gathered together in sundry parts to witness the spectacle, seemed to find much to be pleased

with in it. The prisoners within the inclosure grinned, without sound of merriment, and I thought that the rascally faces amongst them looked the rascallier for their smiles. The second sailor beside the box filled the hanging bucket afresh, and the wrinkled mariner continued to watch the doctor.

‘That’ll have extinguished the brimstone in him!’ exclaimed Captain Barrett, giving another great laugh. ‘Is the idea yours?’

‘No,’ answered the doctor. ‘I took the idea from a female convict ship which I went on board of at Sydney.’

By this time the half-drowned youth within had recovered his breath and was roaring out curses again. The doctor waited three minutes; then signed. The wrinkled sailor tilted the bucket, and the confined wretch was soused for the second time. Once more Captain Barrett laughed loudly, and a rumble of laughter came from the seamen, who hung about in groups forward. I had imagined that two buckets would have done the fellow’s business for him, yet in five minutes he began to curse and swear once

more, whereupon a third bucket was upset over his head. This proved effectual. No more noise proceeded from the inside of the box. The doctor, having waited some time, spoke to Captain Barrett, who crossed to the sentry at the quarter-deck barricade gate and delivered certain instructions. Shortly afterward, Mr. Stiles came into the cuddy and ordered me to the pantry. I afterwards heard that the fellow in the box was silent whilst he stood in it, and that when he was let out and taken below he looked the most miserable, soaked, scowling, shame-faced, shivering wretch that was ever clothed in felon's garb.

CHAPTER XXVI

SHE ATTENDS CHURCH SERVICE AND WITNESSES
A TRAGEDY

AT lunch that day the doctor congratulated himself warmly upon the success of the ducking punishment. 'I never doubted,' said he, 'that it would fail in the case of female convicts. Two buckets they told me sufficed for the most clamorous of the foul-mouths. But I had my misgivings as to its efficacy with male prisoners. I am satisfied. The fellow below seems to have been soaked into repentance. I spoke to him in the prison a little while since, and he humbly begged my pardon and promised never to use another oath again.'

'It's a goosefleshing discipline,' said Captain Barrett! 'but they'll make a joke of it in the tropics.'

‘Is this box arrangement your only punishment, Ellice?’ said the subaltern.

‘We have thin water-gruel,’ answered the doctor. ‘I know a man who became sincerely religious after two days of thin water-gruel. Then there are the irons which I have struck off, with or without the addition of handcuffs. Then there is the prison. Separation works wholesomely. Loneliness is good physic for the felon mind. Finally, there’s a black-list, in which I enter the offender’s name for submission to his Excellency the Governor at the end of the voyage.’

The subject was then changed. To this brief talk I listened greedily, forgetting Will’s hint that I should carry a deaf face. I met the doctor’s eyes, but my duties dismissed me to the galley, and I was out of the cuddy while the meal lasted.

That afternoon, whilst I was rubbing the shining length of cuddy-table, the doctor came from his cabin. He looked at me a moment or two and then approached. There was a sort of kindness in his manner; he even put on a grave, condescending smile when he

addressed me. It was seldom that Doctor Russell-Ellice smiled.

‘I am glad to believe,’ said he, ‘that I was mistaken in you. One of the apprentices, who, I understand, is very respectably connected, has, I hear, some knowledge of you. But, young man, you should have chosen any vessel sooner than a convict ship to hide yourself in.’

I cast my eyes down.

‘I observe that you take a great interest in all conversation that relates to convicts. I am willing to believe you honest. You will therefore give me, truthfully, your reason for the interest you take in the prisoners?’

‘It is curiosity more than interest, sir. I have often read and heard about convict ships. I cannot help feeling curious and listening and looking about me.’

He stared at me searchingly and seemed satisfied. But I noticed with some alarm that he observed my face with unusual attention, taking the lineaments, so to speak, one by one. He then glanced down me—afterwards let his eyes rest upon my hands, and all this

in silence which might have filled an interval of nearly a minute.

‘What’s your age?’ he asked.

This was forcing my hand; but then I was a woman, and no woman is expected to tell the truth when she is asked her age.

‘I am seventeen, sir.’

‘You do not seem to have been ill-used,’ said he, again gravely smiling. ‘A plumper, healthier young fellow I never met. What made you run away?’

‘I wished to go to Hobart Town.’

‘Would not your friends have equipped and sent you out respectably had you made known your wishes?’

‘My stepfather is no friend of mine, sir,’ I answered.

He asked me what I meant to do when I arrived in Tasmania, and after putting many questions, most of which I answered, he bade me tell him what my religion was, in what churches I worshipped, and then began to lecture me; indeed, to sermonise me as though I had been a convict under him. I listened with a hung head and composed face, but I

could not draw my breath freely till he was gone, for all the time he addressed me his dark, scrutinising eyes seemed to search into my very conscience. And then again I feared his perception as a medical man.

Next day was Sunday. The captain sent word forward, and the instructions reached us aft, that the whole of the ship's company were to attend Divine service on the poop at ten o'clock. It was again a bright and beautiful day. When I went on deck in the early morning, I was in time to behold a most glorious pink and silver sunrise ; our coppered forefoot had cloven the first of the warm parallels, and already the flying-fish were darting from the froth of the curl of the low wave ; the ship was heaped with gleaming spaces of canvas to her trucks, and was leaning over to the pressure of the cordial breath of the north-east trade-wind. She was sailing fast ; the sea was smooth, and the spitting of the narrow band of passing brine was like the sound of satin torn by the hand ; and satin-like was the long gleam of the

water, with a few small seabirds swiftly winging along it in chase.

The routine, I observed, was the same as on other days. The convict deck-washers, superintended by the captains of deck, helped the watch to wash down as usual ; the cooks were admitted past the sentry, and speedily a cloud of black smoke was blowing from the prisoners' galley chimney. When the decks had been swabbed, the convicts in divisions were turned up to wash themselves, and at eight o'clock they went to breakfast.

It was whilst the messmen were standing in a compact row beyond the main-hatch door waiting for their cans of cocoa, that I saw Tom. He was one of the messmen. I found an excuse to pass him thrice, that I might greet him with my eyes and observe him. I saw passion and grief and love in his face when our gaze met, though neither of us durst venture on more than a passing look. It half broke my heart that I should be so close to him and yet unable to speak. Whilst he waited with the rest I could, indeed, have made shift to pass him a fourth time, but the

strain was so terrible that I feared myself. I felt a swelling within me as of hysteria, an ungovernable madness to rush to him, to fling my arms about his neck, to hold him to me. So I passed into the cuddy, and a little later the body of prisoners went below and, saving the sentries, the inclosure was empty.

After the cuddy breakfast was over, whilst taking some dirty dishes forward, I met Will near the galley. He said, softly: 'I was on the poop watching you when you walked up and down past Butler to look at him. Old woman, these are risks and you mustn't run 'm. There are eyes aboard here sharper than that chap's bayonet.'

'I'll run no risks, and all's well so far, Will.'

'What about that letter you were telling me of? I dread to hear of your attempting to give it to your sweetheart.'

I looked at him with a smile. He asked me if I slept comfortably, if his clothes fitted me, if I had seen the prisoner boxed up and washed down yesterday, and so on. 'You'll

be up on the poop for prayers at four bells,' said he. 'Lord!' he added, bursting into a nervous laugh. 'To think of only two in this ship knowing what you are! To think of you, a young man as habit is bringing me to fancy you, being the real and original Marian of the milk and buttercup holiday times! What would mother say to see you as you stand here now, as complete a shell-back to the eye as that second mate there, with a big basket of dirty dishes alongside of you lugged all the way from the cuddy by your own little hands? And all for love—all for love! By glory! But the woman that could make me dress up as a girl and follow her to sea in a convict ship would have to sink down straight from heaven. This earth couldn't manufacture her.' He rounded on his heel and went off.

Some time before ten o'clock the ship's bell was rung; presently Mr. Balls's silver pipe sang in shrill whistlings through the ship. Mr. Stiles had ordered me below to 'clean myself,' as he called it, and on my return I followed him and Frank on to the

poop. The scene was one of extraordinary life and full of brilliant colour. I never can forget that picture of this first Sunday morning I passed on board a convict ship.

When I gained the poop, the ship was crowded with people in motion. The whole of the crew, in such clean Sunday clothes as they could muster, were coming aft. The convicts, in a seemingly endless procession, were passing through the door of the hatch and massing themselves behind the quarter-deck barricade with their faces aft. The guard, saving the sentries on duty, were drawn up in a line on the poop, giving an amazing brightness to the scene with their red coats, shakos, and sparkling arms. Their officers were in full dress, and the doctor in the uniform of a surgeon of the Royal Navy. The commander of the ship stood near the doctor. Behind the soldiers were women and children. Aft, at the extremity of the poop, his figure rising and falling against the dim azure over the stern, stood the solitary figure of the helmsman grasping the wheel, whose

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brass-work flamed in the sun, and abreast of him paced the second officer, who had charge of the ship. The sailors came tumbling up the lee poop-ladder, and soon all the forward portion of this raised deck was crowded with people.

Such a sight as it was! But I beheld a horror in the beauty of it. Oh, the very spirit of horror itself entered the beauty of that spectacle of shining ship and radiant uniforms and glowing sea out of the mass of human misery and sin down on that main-deck there. I had a clear view of the convicts. I ran my eye over the line of faces whilst I sought for Tom, and my very heart shrank within me at sight of the countenances my gaze briefly settled on. Prejudice, grief and rage may have made me find the villainous looks of numbers more villainous than they were. I viewed them as my sweetheart's associates, as ruffians and crime-laden scoundrels, into whose vile company my honest, pure-minded sailor, my innocent, injured Tom, had been thrust to toil in irons with

them, to lie at night with them, listening to their talk.

The solitary occupant of the forecastle was the sentry. He walked the deck from one rail to the other, sometimes halting to survey the scene. The doctor stood amidships of the break of the poop and began to read in a loud, firm, but slightly nasal voice from the Book of Common Prayer. Every head was bared. The convicts gazed intently up at the reader. There was a pathos in the wondering, staring looks of many of them—a something of childishness that sat strangely on their faces, as if their gross, unlettered ignorance was to be astonished and pleased by the cleverness of a man who read without difficulty, as though he perfectly understood the meaning of what he delivered. Barney Abram was in the front rank of the mass of men. His gaze was fixed on the doctor ; his posture was one of humility. I observed that he occasionally nodded as though in appreciation when the doctor paused upon a passage and looked at the convicts. Tom was behind. I saw him with difficulty. The least movement of my head blotted him

out by bringing the heads of men in front between us.

The picture was memorably impressive. I have it now bright in my mind's eye, all the hues as gay as the shining colours in the silver plate of a daguerreotype. Nothing disturbed the stillness upon the ship but the voice of the doctor. Yes, you heard a soft, creaming noise of running waters, and at intervals a gentle flap from aloft, and sometimes there would break in a homely sound from the live-stock forward. Never had the sea looked so wide nor our ship so lovely. The feathering billows ran chasing in flashes and gleams into the south-west, where the ocean trembled in a dark blue, with a horizon firm as though ruled upon the delicate azure of the heavens. South-east, under the sun, it was all blinding splendour—sheer dazzle that streamed to the tall, leaning weather side of the ship and broke from the bow in sudden light like molten silver.

When the doctor had recited as much of the Liturgy as he thought proper to deliver, he paused to breathe a while and drink from a

glass of water which stood at his feet. He then began a sermon. He was in the midst of his discourse, to which the prisoners appeared to listen with close attention, Barney Abram occasionally nodding in approval or admiration as before, when a convict, who stood close against the barricade on the port-hand side—I mean that fore-and-aft barricade which formed the gangway alley, as I call it—tossed up his arms and in a loud, deep-chested, tragedy voice cried out :

‘I could tell a story
Would rouse thy lion-heart out of its den,
And make it rage with terrifying fury.’

The doctor stopped.

‘Silence there!’ roared a voice.

‘Who was that?’ exclaimed the doctor.

‘Thomas Garth, sir,’ responded a convict, standing near the prisoner who had broken out.

The doctor stared for a while in the direction of the man as though waiting to see if this extraordinary offence of interruption would be repeated. The convict was clear within my view ; he was the tall, dark, hand-

some man whom I supposed, and, indeed, rightly supposed, to be the tragedian that one of the soldiers had told me was amongst the prisoners. After an interval of two or three minutes, all remaining quiet, the doctor resumed ; but scarcely had he pronounced a dozen words when I saw the actor throw up his right arm, and, whilst he brandished his left fist, making the strangest, maddest faces in doing so—and at this moment I see the lunatic fire in his eyes as he rolled them along the line of us who stood at the break of the poop—he burst out :

‘Oh, dismal! ’Tis not to be borne! Ye moralists!
Ye talkers! What are all your precepts now?
Patience! Distraction! Blast the tyrant, blast him!
Avenging lightnings, snatch him hence, ye fiends!
Nature can bear no more.’

‘Seize that man!’ roared the doctor, who seemed instantly to understand what had come to the unhappy wretch.

But a man who goes on a sudden raving-mad is not very easily seized. This convict was immensely strong ; his chest, bulk, and stature were assurance of that. All in a moment half a dozen prisoners were rolling

upon the deck, beaten down by the madman's fists and elbows as though they had been children. With agility that might be possible only to such madness as was in him, the man sprang, grasped the top of the barricade, and with a kick of his feet vaulted into the gangway between. He ran a few yards forward, sprang upon a scuttle-butt and gained the bulwarks, on which he stood erect, holding by nothing, swaying his fine figure with the movements of the ship, laughing the shocking laughter of madness and shaking his clenched fists at the poop.

'Seize him!' shrieked the doctor, nearly throwing me as he rushed to the poop ladder.

'Come down!' roared the sentry on the forecastle, and the bayonet flashed as he swept his piece from his shoulder to level it.

'Quick, or he'll be overboard!' bawled Captain Sutherland.

The swaying figure on the bulwark rail roared with maniac laughter.

'Come down, or I'll fire!' shouted the forecastle sentry.

'He's mad! He's mad!' went up in the

very thunder of noise from the mass of the convicts.

It was then that I heard Captain Barrett cry to the sentry not to fire ; but the man did not hear ; he stood at a considerable distance from the poop, and the roar of the convicts was in the air as the captain shouted. The soldier fired. I screamed with the voice of a woman when I beheld the spit of the flame and the blue wreath of the smoke.

‘Oh, Jesu !’ cried the convict. He turned slowly, as though to look at the man who had shot him, and fell backward into the sea.

The women behind the line of guards shrieked, and some of them fainted. My knees failed me, and I sank down in the horror of that moment, clutching at a stanchion of the brass rail. Captain Barrett delivered an order swiftly and fiercely, and the armed guard came with a hurried tramp to the brass rail, the outermost one on the left thrusting me with his foot to get me out of the road. Sick and terrified as I was, my wits were sufficiently collected to mark an ugly movement among the prisoners, an indescribable stir of

figures, quick turnings of the face and eyes, as though the many-headed beast sniffed blood and saw its chance. It might have been that they were enraged by the slaying of the maniac, yet nothing more sinister, nothing more deeply tragic in its suggestions than that stir of agitation, those sudden, wild, eager looks and movements of the head could be imagined.

The man had fallen overboard on the weather side of the ship. The sailors assembled on the poop rushed to the rail when the man reeled and dropped; they shouted as they stood looking; the captain sped to the grating abaft the wheel and gazed astern there, calling to know if anyone saw anything of the man. Twenty throats were bawling: some saw him; some said he had gone down like lead; some that he had been shot through the heart, and that there would be nothing to pick up. Meanwhile the ship was sweeping swiftly and smoothly onward; the white brine spun in sheets past the quarters, and the ridged seas of the trade-wind beat their plumes of snow into showerings of spray against the coppered

bends of the heeling vessel. The spread of canvas was great—the studding-sails were out besides. The seamen would have needed a clear deck to bring the ship to the wind, and the convicts still stood massed, covered and overawed by the soldiers at the line of the break of the poop—every man so grasping his musket as to be ready to take aim at the word of command.

The time was wild with confusion and terror; the sailors continued to shout as they looked astern. Some of the children were yelling loudly with fright on the poop; sharp, harsh cries resounded from the main deck, where I saw the doctor thrusting in amongst the convicts, whilst a few of the men whom he had appointed ‘captains’ appeared to be shoving and pushing and marshalling the prisoners so as to form them into some sort of marching order for the descent of the main hatch.

Captain Sutherland came hastily forward to the rail and looked down upon the convicts. He then shouted to his chief mate, who was standing near a quarter-boat to windward.

‘Send all hands forward, Mr. Bates ! Send all hands forward, sir ! There’s nothing to be done !’ and he motioned significantly toward the main-deck.

And, indeed, until the convicts were all in their quarters below, nothing was to have been done, for the seamen must have gone amongst them to haul and drag upon certain of the gear. At the foot of the mainmast, for example, were belayed many ropes, all belonging to the vast spread of sail stretching on high overhead, and this mast stood within the barricades. What might have happened had the sailors rushed in amongst the convicts to bring the ship to the wind ?

Captain Sutherland stood pale and still at the head of the poop ladder ; the ship’s company were streaming forward through the gangway galley, and when I quitted the poop in the tail of the procession of women and children, the captain, the officers, and the line of soldiers, who stood in a posture to instantly cover the convicts, alone remained on that deck.

I stood in the recess along with Frank and

some of the soldiers' wives, waiting to see what was going to happen within the barricades. One of the convicts had been killed or stunned by the maniac, and lay as motionless as a log. The sentinel who had shot the man trudged the fore-castle with frequent looks in the direction of the main-deck, as though prepared at any instant for a call to level his piece afresh. The women near me jabbered incessantly, and every tongue wagged in defence of Murphy, as they called the soldier.

‘God pity me!’ exclaimed Frank, looking at the woman. ‘But it vhas murder to shoot a madman.’

‘Mind your own business!’ cried one of the women, angrily. ‘It’s the duty of a soldier to obey orders, and the orders of a sentry are to shoot down any convict who gets over the barricade and attempts to leave the ship. So there!’ she cried spitefully. I believe she was Murphy’s wife. ‘How was the sentry to know he was mad? If a soldier don’t obey orders he stands to be shot himself. So there.’

‘It vhas murder,’ said Frank, and, smiting

his thigh, he cried, 'she makes my blood boil.'

'If you calls it murder again,' said another of the women, 'I'll speak to the sergeant, and he shall talk to you. You're a low German fellow, and us soldiers' wives are not to be insulted by the likes of you.'

'So there!' cried the woman who had just spoken, spitting the words at the young fellow.

Meanwhile sharp orders were being delivered within the barricade. I took my chance of being reprimanded from the poop and went a little way along the alley, and saw all the convicts still massed, but in motion; they were descending the hatch, but one at a time, for there was room for no more. The body of the fellow who had been stunned was held by four of the prisoners. The doctor stood alone and apart within the inclosure, looking at the men as they swarmed slowly toward the main hatch, filtering to their quarters. He was white, but stern and collected. Sometimes he spoke, pointing or moving his hand as though to insist on more order. He seemed

a fearless figure, and though I disliked him, I could not but admire him. There were scores, perhaps, amongst those felons who would have made no more of felling him and kicking out his brains than of dashing an egg to the deck.

I did not see Tom, so I went back to the recess, and just then an apprentice struck six bells. Ten minutes later, every convict was below and the main-deck clear ; but I observed that when the guard came off the poop one of the soldiers passed through the quarter-deck gate to double the sentry at the main hatch, and I heard another tell one of the women, as he went below to the barracks, that he was to do duty as second sentry at the prison-door of the steerage bulkhead.

CHAPTER XXVII

SHE LISTENS TO A CONVERSATION

ALL the time I was in the cuddy that day, whilst the captain and officers lunched, I kept my ears open, supposing that the talk would wholly concern the dreadful, tragic incident of the morning. But no man said a word on the subject. Perhaps they had talked it out before they came to the table, or perhaps they would not speak of it before me and the other stewards. I was greatly disappointed. I wanted to hear that the sentry had exceeded his instructions and was to be severely punished. It was horrible that a man should be empowered to shoot down a fellow-creature as the sentry shot down the poor mad actor. I had hoped that Captain Sutherland, whose heart was a British sailor's, would ask the doctor and the officers why a sentry should be in-

structed to fire at a man for no worse crime than scaling a barricade and climbing on to the bulwarks of the ship. To kill a man for so behaving might be all very well in harbour, where a convict could contrive to swim ashore. But what dream of liberty could visit an unhappy wretch in mid-ocean, unless it were the freedom that death provides? And why should a convict be shot for attempting suicide? Out of mercy, that his blood might be upon the head of another instead of on his own?

The cool chatter of the officers upon light, frivolous topics filled me with wrath. I wanted to hear them talk of the shooting of the madman. But nothing was said. No reference was made to that strange, threatening stir which had been visible amongst the convicts, like the passing of a sudden darkness over a waving field of grain. The doctor was very stern. He ate little and talked seldom. Only once did I catch the least allusion to that morning's bloody business. I was coming up from the pantry with some glasses, when I heard Captain Sutherland

say, 'By-the-by, how is the man that was knocked down?'

'All right again,' answered the doctor.

'He lay like a corpse,' said the captain.

'He was stunned,' said the doctor. And then Captain Barrett spoke, and the subject was changed.

I went forward that night after dark, when my work was done, knowing it was Will's watch below, and wishful for a chat with him. He lay, smoking, upon a chest in his cabin, and an apprentice swung overhead in a hammock, with one leg dangling down. I could not converse before that fellow up there, though nothing would have been thought had I entered and sat down beside Will, for it was gone about that he knew me through his father having had mine for a client.

He saw me by the light of the slush lamp that sootily burned against the bulkhead near the door, nodded, and, filling his pipe afresh, lighted it and lounged out. We leaned against the ship's galley to leeward, where all was quiet.

‘What have you to tell me about this morning’s fearful job?’ said I.

‘A sweet experience for you, my honey,’ said he. ‘See what’s to be learned by stowing oneself away in a convict ship.’

‘What will they do to the soldier who killed the man?’

‘Do to him? Give him a stripe to wear on his arm when they get ashore.’

‘It was a brutal murder!’ I exclaimed.

‘You say that because your sympathies are below. Duty’s no murder. The man obeyed orders, and very right orders they are. Let me tell you, my daisy, there’s a very considerable slice of hell stowed away under hatches in this ship; and if it wasn’t for the guffies, there’d be such a blaze as ’ud make you, for one, wish Stepney were closer aboard than it is.’

‘Do you mean to tell me,’ said I, ‘that twenty soldiers in command of half a man and a puppy can keep two hundred and thirty desperate, fearless, crime-hardened ruffians under?’

‘Two hundred and thirty! That figure

counts Butler as one of the beauties, eh ? ' said he, laughing. ' But I answer yes ; twenty soldiers can do it, backed, of course, by our machinery of barricades, manholes, and the rest of it, not to mention a moral influence that counts more usefully than a great gun loaded chock-a-block with scissors and thumb-screws.'

' If those convicts had found a leader to-day,' said I, ' they would have seized the ship.'

He turned his head about in the gloom to see if anybody was near.

' Seize the ship ! ' he exclaimed with a little snort of contempt. ' With a file of soldiers splendidly placed ready to fire amongst the devils as fast as they could load ! With three sentries in addition to help ! With officers and a crew ready to support the soldiers ! But, hang me,' said he, with a change of voice and peering close into my face to catch a sight of me, ' if I don't think you're sorry the ship wasn't seized ! '

' I wish you didn't excuse the diabolical murder. I'd shoot that sentry with my own hand for killing a poor, unhappy madman

goaded into insanity, for all you know, by an unjust sentence. It might have been Tom. Suppose Tom's heart broke and his mind went? A soldier would shoot him !'

'D'ye know you hiss when you talk? I used to like your spirit, but love is making a tigress of you. You make a fellow afraid?'

But I had not come to talk with him to do that. I wanted news, and he had none; and I had no idea of scaring or disgusting the dear lad by causing him to fancy that my sympathies were with the felons under hatches when I had a heart but for one man only in the whole world. Will was just the sort of lad to betray me that I might not come to harm or harm others; so, after laughing at his likening me to a tigress, I talked of Stepney and his father's house near the Tower, and in a few minutes the pair of us were happy in old, kind, gentle memories.

He grew a little inquisitive presently, however, and asked me some questions.

'Have you thought of what you mean to do when you arrive at Hobart Town?'

‘I shall be guided entirely by what is done with Tom,’ I answered.

‘Shall you settle in Tasmania?’

‘Somewhere in that part of the world,’ I said. ‘Once a convict, always a convict. I know Tom and his proud heart; if his innocence could be established on his arrival and liberty given to him, he’d not return home. He hates England—I’ll swear it. And I hate home for his sake.’

‘You’ll sell your house in Stepney, I suppose!’

‘Yes, I may do that. There’s much I may do. I shall be guided by what befalls Tom. I have money enough to establish ourselves in comfort. We shall want for nothing in our new home.’

‘Maybe I shall turn squatter, myself,’ said Will. ‘There’s a big thing to be done in wool. But give me New South Wales. I wish they had sent Butler there. What’s become of the *Arab Chief*, I wonder? And does he lose all the money he invested in her?’

‘No,’ said I.

Here some seamen came and lolled alongside of us ; we could talk no more, so I went aft.

All next day the doctor was full of business. I heard him tell the captain at the breakfast-table what the routine was to be : at half-past eight prayers and a portion of the Scriptures were to be read to the prisoners in divisions, some below, some on deck, as the weather might permit ; then schools were to be formed, but this could not be done until the doctor had ascertained the ability of the prisoners to read—he needed time to put a book into each man's hand to test him. Every school would consist of nine or ten pupils ; schoolmasters would be selected from the best educated of the convicts. School would be held morning and afternoon ; after supper, at four o'clock, the doctor would regularly deliver a lecture on any subject likely to improve and enlighten his hearers.

You'll suppose he was a busy man. Indeed ! he had a hundred things to see to. Besides the schools, the lectures and the like, exercise had to be arranged for, the washing

of linen, airing of bedding and so forth. Then there was the hospital to visit, troublesome convicts to examine and punish, a journal to write up, and I know not what besides. This, the first Monday of fine weather and freedom of irons, was spent by him in planning the convict routine for the voyage. I collected from his talk at the table that the prisoners were very quiet, and looking forward with interest to the educational work he was cutting out for them. He told Captain Sutherland he had addressed them below very seriously on the Sunday morning's tragic business; in fact at lunch he spoke out without reserve.

‘I was impressed,’ said he, ‘by the thoughtful looks of many of the unhappy people when I bade them accept the death of the poor, miserable man Garth as an awful warning—not in respect of discipline, not in respect of the penalty that attaches to insubordination, but in regard to their souls’ health.’ And then he occupied ten minutes in repeating what he had said to the convicts. Lieutenant Chimmo hemmed and tried to

break through the dull prosing; but the doctor loved his own eloquence too well to let his companions off a single sentence that he could recollect. 'I believe,' said he, 'that there is some good in that man Barney Abram, after all. I observed that he was very attentive at Divine service yesterday.'

'But he is not of your persuasion, surely?' said Captain Sutherland.

'He's of the persuasion of them all,' answered the doctor.

'The persuasion that has the devil for high priest, eh, Ellice?' said Captain Barrett.

'That's so,' said the doctor. 'Barney Abram is a man I should be proud and thankful to bring over. He was a very bad lot at home. This ship might not hold all the wretches he has tempted and ruined. Yet I seemed to find an expression of contrition in the fellow's face, a softening look as though he might not prove so inaccessible as I had feared. He asked leave to speak to me before I came up from below this morning, and I

was gratified to understand that his object was to thank me for the remarks I had offered to the prisoners on the subject of the sudden appalling death of Garth.'

Captain Barrett burst into one of his great laughs, for which he apologised by saying that he was thinking of a story he had heard of Barney; it was not fit to repeat, however.

'Then, sir,' said the doctor, sternly, 'we'll not trouble you for it.'

'Whisper,' said the subaltern, side-long, to his brother-officer.

'Have you given the prize-fighter any sort of appointment, doctor?' said Captain Sutherland.

'Not yet. I have my eye on him. His immense strength will make him useful. He may end as my first captain. Had he stood near the madman, the poor fellow would now be alive. Abram is, perhaps, the only man in the ship who could have grasped and held him.'

He then talked of his schools. His head was full of the thing. I learned, through

listening, that the Admiralty instructions provided for the establishment of schools and religious teaching.

After the doctor had made all his arrangements on this Monday, nothing happened of any consequence that I can recall for some time. We carried a strong north-east trade-wind, and we drove along by day and by night, with foam sometimes lifting to the cathead. There was scarcely need to handle a rope, so fresh and steady was the trade-wind, with its wool-white clouds scattering like sheep down the sky and the horizon bright and hard and blue in the windy distance. At times I caught sight of Tom. The intervals were wide, and I never found an opportunity to breathe so much as a syllable of love to him. And this was very well. It was enough that he knew I was on board, and that we were able sometimes to see each other. I never attempted to write a second letter. The risk of delivering it was too great, and I was resolved to run no risks, lest some act that would add nothing to Tom's happiness nor mine should betray me and extinguish my hopes, nay,

slay my chance of reaching Tasmania with him in the same ship.

Sometimes I feared my sex was dimly suspected, but mainly my mind was at rest on that score. The persons I was afraid of were the two military men and the German steward. The idea of my being a woman, I am sure, never entered the doctor's mind. Had he entertained the least suspicion, he was just the man to settle it out of hand by sending me down among the soldiers' wives to be examined. And yet, when I peeped at myself in one of the long cuddy mirrors, I'd wonder at the success of my masquerade. I repeat here that I was a very fine figure of a woman. In none of the points which are admirable in the equipment of the best shaped of my sex was I lacking. Yet it is certain that my impersonation was perfect, and that, if I except the three men I have named, there was not a man in the ship who by looks or speech caused me the least anxiety.

However, to provide against the reasons of my being on board becoming known, should detection of my sex happen unexpect-

edly, I sought out Will one evening, and had a long, earnest chat with him. I put it to him thus :

‘ You are supposed to know me ; that is to say, you are supposed to know that I am the son of a man who was a client of your father. Suddenly I am discovered to be a girl. The captain sends for you, and you are challenged in the presence of the doctor. What will you say ? ’

‘ That’s where it is,’ said he. ‘ Make one false step, and ten to one if you’re not presently up to your neck.’

He scratched his head and mused, staring at me. I would not help him. I wished to test the quality of his wits in case he should be challenged as I have said. After a bit, he exclaimed :

‘ I should disown all knowledge of you.’

‘ That’s good,’ said I.

‘ I’d say you told me your name was Simon Marlowe and that your father was a client of my father’s. I should tell no lie by owning I believed the story, because, you see, uncle was a client of the dad’s. Well,’ he

went on, 'I should tell them that now you proved to be a girl, you weren't the young fellow I took you for, and I should call you a liar and disown all knowledge of you.'

'And in saying so you'd be strictly speaking the truth, so far as Simon Marlowe is concerned,' said I, rejoiced to find him so ready. 'You'll disown me. You'll call me a liar. You'll know nothing whatever about me. That'll be the programme, Will, should you be called upon.'

We stood discussing the matter some time, and then separated, but I was mightily glad to have had this talk with him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SHE OVERHEARS TWO SAILORS TALKING

FOR many days we met with very beautiful weather, and every day the sun grew hotter and hotter. The moon enlarged and became a full moon, and the prospect of the dark blue night, with the moon shining higher in the heavens than ever I had seen her shine, and the stars in multitudes of brilliants trembling in a very sheet of silver down to the vague, obscure line of the horizon, was glorious and wonderful. Often on those fine nights, instead of going to bed, I'd creep to the forecastle, where nobody walked but the sentry and a seaman on the look-out. There I would overhang the head rail and gaze down at the star-white foam as it spread out with a soft, boiling noise from the steady, shearing thrust of the cutwater. The sea was full of fire and many strange shapes of

dim, greenish flame swept past in the black water as I looked. The moonlight lay upon the sails and they rose stirless as carvings in marble. The stars glittered like jewels in the dark arches under the sails and twinkled gem-like along the black lines of the yards, and danced like the mystic fire of the corporant beyond the trucks to the swaying of the fragile points of masthead.

Oh, it was at such times as these that I longed for Tom! What happiness, I would think, to have his hand in mine; to be standing here at his side, gazing up with him at the moon-whitened canvas, or watching the sea-fire leaping in sparks amidst the rushing froth on either hand! He had talked once of my going a voyage with him. He had talked, too, of his carrying me to sea when we were married. I could understand what I had lost when I stood lonely on that dark fore-castle watching the yearning breasts of canvas leaning from the wind and thinking of the home that was low down behind the sea. My heart beat with passion when, on these lovely moonlight nights, sweet with the strong blowing

of the trade wind, I'd think of my dear one locked up in the 'tweendecks below—imprisoned with the rest of them since half-past six, to emerge from the pestilential atmosphere at daybreak—for what?

Whilst I thus thought, I'd clench my hands in the agony of my mind till the nails were driven into the palms of them.

But everything went along very quietly. Tables were knocked together, and schools held on deck in the inclosure; that is, a proportion of the schools. There was not room for all, and the convict classes alternated between the 'tweendecks and the main-deck. The doctor speedily found out that Tom was one of the best educated of the prisoners, and set him to help in teaching the many wretches who knew not their alphabet. But it rarely happened, as I have said, that I saw my sweetheart. Either I was at work in the cuddy when he was on deck, or he was below, or the schools broken up when I might have found leisure to watch him.

I often speculated upon the histories of the many convicts—chose a face and mused

upon it. My conviction—nay, my ^{more than} knowledge—that Tom was as innocent as I of the crime for which he was being transported made me think that there might be others as guiltless as he; and this sort of fancy or sympathy often raised a passion of pity in me as I'd stand staring at a convict, striving to fetch his life-story out of his face, though, for all I knew, the man I watched might have been one of the very worst scoundrels in the ship.

What affected me most was the guessing that lots of them must have left wives and mothers, children and dear ones behind. I had heard the doctor say that not above one out of every one hundred convicts ever returned home, so that, unless the parents or the wives of the poor, miserable felons followed them, they would be as completely sundered from home ties as though they had been sentenced to the gallows instead of to the hulks and transport. My eyes would moisten sometimes in thus thinking whilst I watched a prisoner in some hour of leisure, fancying a past for him. Once I saw this: Two children belonging to the soldiers had strayed into the

knowledge
facts

gangway alley and were playing there. I observed a convict, a middle-aged man, watching them. A sudden spasm contorted his face. He jerked down his hand in a snapping way, in some instant anguish of memory, as though he cast something from him, and turned his head and moved a few paces, then raised his cuff to his eye, with a look-round afterward to see if he was noticed.

One evening I went forward, meaning to get upon the fore-castle to breathe the air. It was hot in the recess. Some women were seated round the booby-hatch, and the noise of the children vexed the mood I was then in. It was toward the close of the second dog-watch and dark. I saw some figures on the fore-castle, and learnt by the voices that Mr. Stiles, Mr. Balls, and the sailmaker were of them. Therefore, that I might be private, meaning to breathe in solitude upon the fore-castle later on, I went round to the lee side of the galley, the door of which was closed, and stood there, looking at the dark sea above the line of the bulwark rail, for the ship was heeling over somewhat sharply this night.

Though the noise of the pouring and foaming brine rose shrill and strong, other sounds were very plainly to be heard. For instance, I often caught what they said upon the fore-castle, though the speakers were at a distance. The main-deck was empty. A few figures moved about the poop. Presently two sailors stationed themselves against the foremost end of the galley, round the corner, so to say, facing the lofty pillar of the fore-mast. I smelt the fumes of their coarse tobacco. They could not see me nor I them ; but what they said was as distinct as though they stood alongside of me, spite of their speaking in subdued voices. I knew not who they were, but guessed them to be two fore-castle hands.

‘I had a yarn along with Bob this morning,’ said one of them. ‘Them gallus sentries are made up of eyes. Fust time I’ve been able to speak to him.’

‘What’s he lagged for?’ said the other man.

‘Buzzlement. I knew it ’ud happen. He grew too confident and was ate up with pride.

He might be helping himself now, theayters and dancin' kens as often as you like, lush to swim in and quids for his piece. But the gallus fool must grow greedy; he takes too big a handful, and now he's outward-bound. But twelve bob a week and find himself! A covey with Bob's tastes, too, mind ye, and one of your gallus high-flyers to rig out. But he says he ain't sorry it's over. He never felt comfortable. His piece was always a-scolding and threatening to split if the swag warn't forthcoming; and, blow me, she stumped him, after all, for split she did, but not afore she'd got another cully in tow, unbeknown to Bob, you take your oath.'

'I heard Micky Volkins,' said the other, 'a-telling Bill Flanders that he squeezed in a yarn with his old chum when they was washing down. They scrubbed side by side. Micky says the old chum's glad to be going abroad. The shore-work took it out of him, but the hulk gave satisfaction. The feeding was beef, soup, mutton, spuds, bread, porridge, and treacle. I recollect the boiling. If a man's sick, they put him on sheep's head,

eggs, soft puddens, tea and butter, along with brandy and wine, which they sarve out by the hounce. Is that sailors' fare? Strike my eyes if it ain't good enough to go into irons for !'

'There's only one sailor-man among 'em, Bob was a-saying,' said the first sailor.

'Who's he?'

'Didn't hear his name. Lagged for scuttling a vessel. Gallus good job if the old man tried it on with this ship. Everything's blooming wrong. All the work comes upon a few. What's good goes below; what's stinking's sent for'ard. Well, I never shipped expecting to see Bob, and I'm game to swap places, if they'll consent. Look what's done for 'em! Prayer-meetin's, eddication up to the knocker, a doctor to physic 'em! If a man growls, he's spoke to as a man. One of the convicts complained to the doctor of the cooking. The gent sniffed and tasted, said the man was right and wigged the gallus cook. Let e'er a one of us lay aft, and what's a-goin to happen?'

The conversation was at this point inter-

rupted by the second sailor beginning to sneeze. He sneezed at least twenty times with a great roaring noise. Mr. Balls came to the edge of the forecastle and cried down : ‘ Withered if there ain’t a grampus jumped aboard ! ’ The fit of sneezing passed, and the fellow lighted his pipe afresh, and the men resumed their conversation.

‘ It’s gallus queer,’ said the first speaker, ‘ that there should be only one sailor among ’em.’

‘ One navigator, perhaps,’ said the other.

‘ Well, that may be. I wish they was all ships’ captains for my part—skippers and mates. I’m gallus glad whenever I hear a skipper’s lagged. But they’re too leary, bully. Ha, ha ! They knows how to keep to wind’ard, scrape and go as it often is.’

‘ What’s the coveys made up of ? ’ said the second speaker.

‘ I asked Bob that. “ All sorts,” said he. “ One’s a parson.” ’ Here both sailors laughed loudly. ‘ A harbour missionary, lagged for fishing through the slit in the mission box.’ Both men laughed loudly again. ‘ You’ll know

him, maty, by singling out the cove as carries his hands as though he wore long thread gloves. Bob told me to twig him by that.'

'Only one sea captain?' said the second speaker. 'It must be the next ship, then, that's a-bringing of them out?'

Eight bells at this moment were struck; the boatswain sent some thrilling message through the ship with his pipe; and, unwilling that the two speakers should know that I had been a listener, I went softly round the galley and made my way aft.

The reference to Tom in this conversation had struck me as strange. The men undoubtedly meant Tom when they spoke of one of the convicts as the only sea-captain amongst the prisoners. How should that be known? The doctor was doubtless acquainted with the felons' antecedents, but he never talked and rarely answered questions. The convicts, then, had made the discovery amongst themselves; this I thought extraordinary. Tom might have admitted his calling to the fellows who shared his sleeping berth, to the prisoners who formed the mess

he was in ; but how should it be known to two hundred and twenty-nine convicts that the two hundred and thirtieth was the only sea-captain amongst them ? Perhaps I mistook ; a few had learned Tom's calling, and one of those few had talked with the sailor whose conversation with his mate I had listened to.

I did not give the matter much thought ; I should have given it much less thought had not Tom been the man the sailors referred to. That some of the sailors should have found friends amongst the prisoners was quite in keeping with the looks of a few of the crew. I had often thought that were the forecastle hands to shift clothes with the malefactors, they would make wickeder-looking convicts than the bulk of the prisoners.

CHAPTER XXIX

SHE IS ALARMED BY WHAT IS SAID BY THE
OFFICERS

THE convict ship *Childe Harold* drove steadily down the North Atlantic with the trade-wind, and then, losing those prosperous gales something north of the Equator, crept stealthily through a wide, white, gleaming zone of calms, blurred with fainting catspaws as a mirror is dimmed by the breath. No incident of any sort broke the profound monotony of the routine of shipboard life. Captain Barrett and the subaltern killed the time by firing at a mark with pistols, by cards, chess, deck quoits, fishing for sharks, and the like. Their duties were trifling. The sergeant of the guard seemed to do all the work. The discipline of the sea had the regularity of the tick of a clock. Sights were punctually taken, the log hove, the watch relieved—so it

went on. The crew came and went to the sound of Balls's pipe or to the warning voice of the officer of the watch.

I was now looking very close into the sea life, and was of opinion that it was a sickening, tedious calling. The atmosphere of romance which had coloured my early thoughts of it, got from my father's and his friends' merry or wild or exciting yarns, had perished out of my mind long before we were up with the Equator, as the term is. The captain was burdened with enormous responsibilities. The safety of a large, valuable ship freighted with human lives was dependent upon him, and his pay was perhaps less than the wages of a head-waiter of a City tavern. The mates were at the mercy of the captain, who could break them if he chose, send them forward to do common sailor's work and ruin them. They lived without friendship. One was superior to the other. The captain addressed them only on matters of ship work, and talked familiarly with nobody but the doctor and military officers. There were three mates. Two of them led

lives as lonely as the ship's figure-head ; the third, who was a person of no consequence, would carry his pipe into the boatswain's or apprentices' berth, and so kill time for himself.

I had not guessed that this was the life of the deep when I used to listen to the ocean talk of my father's friends at Stepney or view the ships in the Thames, and create a fairy sea with rich skies and spicy breezes for them to sail over. It was my acquaintance, however, with the forecastle side of the life that completely ruined my idealism. I could not wonder that sailors should be the mutinous and growling dogs they are represented when I peeped into the forecastle and smelt the smells and blinked at the gloom and beheld the damp and the dirt, the half-clad figures of men who had shipped without a shift of clothes and whose wage would not bring them within hail of the slop-chest ; when I saw the lumps of green pork or blue and iron beef carried from the galley into the forecastle along with the slush-thick peasoup or the dingy, bolster-hard duff at which any famished

mongrel of the London streets might hic-cough.

‘Is it the same everywhere at sea?’ I once asked Will.

‘No,’ he answered, ‘the crew are well fed and well treated aboard us—comparatively speaking,’ he added, with a grin.

‘And do you like the life?’ said I.

‘The country must have sailors, young woman?’

‘I would rather be a convict,’ said I.

‘Yet it was not always thus, you know, my pretty Mary Jane,’ he exclaimed, singing. ‘When Butler was a sailor you nailed your heart to the foremast; now he’s a convict you want to clank it through life, eh?’

‘It was not always thus, Mary Jane, because I had never been to sea. I read in books and listened to talk and painted on clouds. Now I am at sea. I have watched the life and swear that I would rather take a convict’s discipline along with a convict’s chances than be a foremast hand.’

My work was light, and this was a wonderful mercy, seeing that I had been made a

cuddy-servant without anybody knowing I was a girl. I washed glasses, fetched and carried dishes, cleaned knives and plate and so on. This was no more than housemaid's work, down even to the scrubbing of the deck, which was the same as washing the floor of a room. Added to this, I slept alone in a comfortable cabin and had all such conveniences as a young woman who masquerades as a boy could need.

I was nearly of Will's height, and his clothes fitted me, and when the weather grew very hot I wore his flannel shirts, serge jacket buttoned up to conceal my figure, and white drill trousers. I also got him to buy me a new grass hat from one of the sailors, and thus attired, I looked the smartest, sauciest young fellow that ever stepped the decks of a ship. The captain and the mates knew how I came by the clothes I wore, and asked no questions.

The Woolwich apparel remained in the upper bunk. Long before this I had opened it and inspected the contents, and found every article as I had packed it. It was a very

large bundle ; it contained my hat and bodice and skirt and the under-linen and shoes I had removed when I dressed myself as a boy.

Meanwhile the doctor was highly satisfied with the progress the convict school-classes were making. He would come to the table and rub his hands and declare, with one of his grave smiles, that since such and such a date So-and-so—and here, perhaps, he would give the initials of a convict or quote several examples by their initials only—had got the Lord's Prayer by heart and was beginning to ^{reach}~~pronounce~~ words of two and even three syllables. I am sure he was a benevolent, good, pious man, but repulsive to my sympathies by sternness and officialism and, perhaps, by the thought that Tom was under him, in his power, of no more account than the rest of the prisoners, many of whom were being transported for vile and some for diabolical crimes.

I'd keep my ears open to hear if he spoke of Tom ; but he never uttered my sweetheart's name nor indicated him by any fashion of his

own. Strange to relate, one of his favourites was now the prizefighter Barney Abram. It puzzled me to imagine by what acts this man Abram had succeeded in gaining the doctor's good opinion and confidence. Certainly during service no man was so attentive as the prizefighter. I see him now with his head slightly on one side, his eyes fixed upon the doctor with an expression of half-complacent admiration, as though what he heard was not only doing him good but amazing him with the beauty and eloquence with which it was delivered. Then I gathered that Barney was very zealous in the school-work. I remember the doctor telling Captain Barrett that the tears stood in the prizefighter's eyes whilst he expressed his gratitude for the opportunities provided by the discipline of the convict ship for improving his understanding and qualifying him to think and reason as a rational, responsible being. Captain Barrett looked silently at the doctor through his eye-glass; but immediately the doctor had quitted the table the captain turned to Lieutenant Chimmo and spoke in a low voice, and then they both

laughed wildly. Indeed, the subaltern beat upon the table as though he would suffocate.

I remember again, one afternoon, that I was sent with a tray of seltzer and glasses to the poop. The commander of the ship was seated in company with the doctor and the two military men. An awning was stretched overhead, and its shadow was pleasant with the breath of a small breeze off the beam, and it danced with a strange pulsing of lights from the diamond twinkling of the brilliant blue sea.

We had by this time crossed the Equator ; I believe our latitude was about three degrees south. Sentries paced the fore part of the poop as usual ; the sentry forward sheltered himself in the gloom of the corner of sail ; a few convicts were lounging in a lifeless manner betwixt the barricades. Tom was one of the convicts. He sat at the foot of the main-mast in the shadow of it with his elbows on his knees, his brows betwixt his clenched fists, his head hanging down, his eyes rooted to the deck, his whole posture extraordinary with its suggestion of that sort of grief which turns a man into stone.

Captain Sutherland and the others sat near the foremost skylight that stood but a short distance from the break of the poop. The captain told me to put the tray down on the skylight and fetch a bottle of brandy. I returned with the brandy and a corkscrew, when, just as I was about to draw the cork, the doctor lifted his hand, and with an odd pleased look, bade me stand still and make no noise. Then it was that I heard a sound of singing; the melody was a hymn, but I cannot give it a name; I have since believed it was the air of a well-known hymn sung to words which were written by some convict converted into an honest man by the doctor during a previous voyage.

I judged by the volume of sound that about ten men sang; they sat under the hatch where the gratings made a frame like a bird-cage, otherwise we should not have heard them. They sang well, in good time, and one deep voice was noticeable for its manner of working into the singing in a harmonising way as though the fellow knew music.

Captain Barrett asked a question.

‘Hush, I beg of you,’ said the doctor, with a face of grave satisfaction.

No one could have listened to the voice of the finest Italian opera-singer of the day with more relish and ardent attention than the doctor to the chanting of the convicts.

The singing ceased. I stood at a little distance, with the brandy and the corkscrew, waiting to be told to draw the cork.

‘Whose was that deep voice?’ said Captain Barrett.

‘Barney Abram’s,’ answered the doctor.

‘Was it a Christian hymn they sang?’ asked Captain Barrett.

‘Certainly,’ responded the doctor. ‘Do you suppose that I would allow any other sort of hymn to be sung in this ship?’

‘What’s Barney’s creed?’ said the subaltern. *He said already “Christian”!*

‘He’s coming right,’ answered the doctor, severely. And then turning to Captain Sutherland, he exclaimed: ‘I know you take an interest in these matters. You will be gratified to learn that Abram expressed a wish yesterday to be received into our Church.’

‘ Indeed ! ’ said Captain Sutherland.

‘ That could only be done by a bishop or a clergyman, I suppose ? ’ said the subaltern.

The doctor, without answering, left the poop, walked to the main hatch and addressed some words to the men at the bottom of it.

‘ What’s your opinion of Barney’s conversion ? ’ said Captain Sutherland to Captain Barrett.

‘ My opinion is, ’ answered the other, ‘ that I shall give instructions for the sentries to keep an extra sharp eye upon him. ’

‘ Now the hymn’s over, suppose we get that cork drawn ? ’ said the subaltern.

I started on the captain of the ship turning to look at me. My eyes had been fastened upon Tom, who, on the doctor approaching the hatchway, had risen and gone to the rail, and stood there looking out to sea. The convicts came up in divisions to breathe the air. It was so burning hot that the doctor had stopped the walking exercise. Tom’s division happened to be up, and my eyes were rooted to his pale face as he stood looking over the rail into the dim blue distance, when

I was startled by Captain Sutherland turning upon me.

‘Draw that cork,’ said he; ‘I had forgotten you.’ And he said to Lieutenant Chimmo, but he did not mean that I should hear him: ‘Do you observe that this lad is always at one’s elbow when the convicts are under discussion?’

This speech brought some colour into my face; I was sensible that I blushed and was deeply vexed that I did so. All three watched me draw the cork out of the brandy bottle. I poured brandy into the tumblers and filled them up with foaming seltzer and handed the draughts to the gentlemen. Captain Barrett looked me hard in the face when I handed him his tumbler. My fears made me find detection in his stare; I thought to myself in his heart this man has found out that I am a woman.

I went toward the companion hatch to re-enter the cuddy; Lieutenant Chimmo said loudly, as though indifferent whether I heard or not: ‘What a devilish good-looking chap he is! He blushes like a girl.’

‘There’s a mystery about the youngster,’ said Captain Barrett. ‘He puzzles me.’

I did not catch what the captain let fall, but feeling alarmed and eager to know if more was said, I ran hastily down the companion steps and posted myself under the open foremost skylight.

‘What makes you think so?’ I heard Lieutenant Chimmo say.

‘He seems too stoutly built for a lad,’ answered Captain Barrett.

‘I’ve met young fellows more girlish-looking than that lad,’ exclaimed Captain Sutherland. ‘The apprentice, Johnstone, I understand, knows all about him. Johnstone is of respectable stock. His father is a solicitor near the Tower; I’ve never done business with him, but he has helped many a poor gentleman of the jacket out of difficulties.’

The subaltern spoke of several effeminate officers whom he had met with in various places. He mentioned one Captain Dawson, who, he said, was called Pretty Polly. He wore his hair parted down the middle; it was a rich auburn and waved, and the fellows of

his regiment tried to persuade him to let it grow to see to what length it would descend. He had no hair except eyebrows and eyelashes upon his face ; his complexion was amazingly delicate, much more so than young Marlowe's. He blushed readily ; his voice was a contralto, and when he sang you thought you were listening to a woman.

This reminded Captain Barrett of a girlish-looking cornet named Sheridan. Then Captain Sutherland furnished an instance of a singularly effeminate second mate ; after which, amid frequent sippings of brandy and seltzer and puffing of paper cigars, the conversation went again to Barney Abram, thence to other matters ; whereupon, satisfied that they had done with the topic of girlish-looking boys, I went to the pantry, breathing a little more freely, though still somewhat uneasy, for I was afraid of the meaning I had found in the stare that Captain Barrett had regarded me with.

CHAPTER XXX

SHE CONVERSES WITH HER SWEETHEART

THE utmost I dared hope was that my sex would remain concealed until we had rounded the Cape of Good Hope. When once our ship had entered the great Southern Ocean, there would be no more land to touch at until Hobart Town was reached. Often at home, whilst thinking of Tom and resolving to follow him, had I studied the map of the world—or rather those portions of the globe which a ship traversed in her passage from the Thames to Tasmania; and I knew that there was no land betwixt Agulhas and the great New-Holland continent, saving two little islands, one called St. Paul's and the other Amsterdam Island, the latter of which it was then customary (I had read or been told) for ships to sight to verify their reckonings. But it was a desert island, not such an island as

the doctor would set me ashore on ; so that after we should round the Cape I had no fear of being landed ; nor was it very conceivable that the doctor, however suspicious he might prove, would think it needful to tranship me should an opportunity occur, seeing that our destination would not then be very remote, with the proper machinery for inquiry at hand there should the doctor or Captain Sutherland think proper to charge me.

I was relieved, however, by finding that, during the remainder of that day, Captain Barrett took no further notice of me. The heat was very great. The doctor said it was like a furnace in the 'tweendecks, and that some of the convicts who were sick in the hospital were suffering fearfully. The heels of three or four wind-sails penetrated the hatches, but the air blew small and fiery hot, and the gushing of it down those canvas pipes made no sensible difference in the fever of the atmosphere of the 'tweendecks, filled with the breath and the heat of the bodies of the two hundred and thirty convicts.

At dinner in the cuddy, on the afternoon

of the third day, dating from the incident of the singing of the hymn in the hatch, the captain spoke of a partial eclipse of the moon that was to happen that evening at about nine o'clock. I stood behind the captain's chair when this was said, for I must tell you that I now regularly waited at table, though Frank was above me, and I had to do work which Mr. Stiles would not have put the young German to.

The doctor lifted his head from the soup-plate which he overhung and exclaimed: 'A partial eclipse of the moon? That will be an interesting sight!'

Captain Barrett and the subaltern asked several questions about this eclipse. The conversation flowed on. I fetched a second or third course from the galley, and whilst the captain carved, the doctor, looking at him, said: 'I have a great mind to allow the convicts, in divisions, to witness this eclipse. The spectacle might produce a very salutary effect upon the minds of many. The loneliness of the ocean, the sight of the familiar face of the moon being slowly darkened—it

will provide me with a fine subject for our address to-morrow, and the prisoners will be more likely to benefit from my discourse by having beheld the eclipse. You are sure, sir, that the hour is nine ?’

‘About nine. I will presently let you know for certain,’ answered the captain.

‘We should require the guard drawn up on the poop,’ said the doctor.

‘Give your orders, Ellice,’ said Captain Barrett.

‘The soldiers and the women will enjoy the sight,’ said the doctor ; ‘it is insufferably hot in the prison. These occasional indulgences often do much good.’

‘How long does the eclipse last ?’ asked the subaltern.

‘I believe the disk is less than a quarter obscured,’ replied the captain.

‘That should give time for each division to take a peep,’ exclaimed Captain Barrett.

Here I was sent into the pantry, and lost what followed. I gathered, however, on my return, from what the doctor and the others let fall, that the matter was settled, and that

the convicts in divisions, the guard being under arms on the poop, were to be brought up on deck to view the partial eclipse of the moon.

Dinner was over in the cuddy by seven. The captain and military officers went on to the poop to smoke, and I carried coffee to them whilst Frank waited upon Mr. Bates and his brother mate. The doctor, who did not smoke, and who drank his wine well watered, descended the booby-hatch to acquaint the prisoners with his intentions, and to make the necessary arrangements. It was a true tropic night, splendid and silent. Often do I recall that night, and always with a bitter sense of the blindness of the human mind, of our incapacity to see one minute ahead of us. The moon at this hour was rising, and the lunar dawn lay in a streak of dim red along the eastern seaboard. I do not remember the hour; it was not yet eight bells; in the west was a fast-waning flush, for we floated in a part of the ocean where the night crosses the sea in a stride. Not a

breath of air ! The waters stretched flat as a surface of polished ebony, and only at intervals there ran a sighing sort of movement over the sea, which sent a delicate stir through the canvas, and set the dew raining from aloft in little pattering showers. In the south there was much lightning ; the leap of the violet sparks flashed up the battlements and ragged brows of a mass of electric cloud. The water reflected the play, and sometimes a little note of distant thunder came humming across the glass-smooth surface. Elsewhere under the brightest of the stars hung tremulous wakes of silver fire.

Even now, early as it was, the mighty shadow of the ocean night was majestic and awful with the wild, flashful colouring of lightning in the south, and the dustlike multitude of stars over the three glooming spires of our ship, and the rising moon rusty-red and imperfect and distorted, as though lifting heavily through some noxious belt of African river vapour.

What I saw, however, was quickly embraced by my sight. Having put the gentle-

men's coffee upon the skylight, I durst not linger.

The steward found me plenty to do till a quarter before nine. I then went to my cabin to refresh myself with a wash. When I came into the cuddy again, I found the lamps turned down and heard a sound of many feet in motion. I stepped into the recess and found nobody there. I walked a little way forward along the gangway alley, and looking up at the poop, saw the guard drawn in a line near the rail. The awning was furled, and the moonlight sparkled on their firearms, and the bayonets glanced as the lightning leapt in the south.

A division of convicts was in the inclosure, standing in dusky groups, and at every man's feet stretched his shadow, with scarcely a move of the clean black line of it, so reposefully did the ship sleep. I saw a crowd of seamen on the forecastle and heard women's voices, and guessed that the wives had gone forward to view the eclipse.

The moon was now bright. You could distinguish faces by her beam. I went

slowly along the gangway alley, looking hard at the prisoners, and when about midway I saw a man standing alone, with his arms folded and his eyes fixed on the moon. It was Tom. I stopped. I must tell you that this fore-and-aft barricade, which was designed as a convenience more than as a prison barrier, was not above five feet high, and formed of strong wooden rails, sufficiently wide apart to disclose the figure. I coughed, and then Tom saw me.

I advanced very slowly in the direction of the forecastle and then came to a stand and seemed to look at the moon; and when I warily turned my eyes upon the inclosure I observed that Tom had advanced as I had and was abreast of me, though he had drawn nearer to the fore-and-aft barricade. My heart beat quickly, for if I could speak to him now it would be the first time since that day when I had whispered as I passed and when he had discovered that I was on board.

I walked a little way farther. This carried me out of sight of the poop, unless any

one should come to the head of the port poop-ladder and stare along the alley. The yards were braced forward, and the corner of the foresail lay between me and the moon, and plunged in shadow that part of the deck where I again halted. I saw that Tom had walked with me on the other side of the barricade, and when I stopped he stopped, too, so close that had he sighed I should have heard him. The shadow that was upon me was upon him and stretched athwart the deck, darkening the two galleys and the great mass of long-boat; but under the yawn of the foresail the forecastle whitened out in the light, with the silvered figures of many persons upon it, and beyond hung the jibs, falling like streaks of snow to the bowsprit and jibbooms. Outside the shadow in the inclosure the moonshine lay like frost upon the planks, and the shapes of the convicts, in their pale apparel, showed like figures in yellow wood. They moved or stood in groups; here and there was a lonely shape. The nearest group to where I had come to a stand was at a distance of about twenty

paces, close against the fore-and-aft barricade. The yet distant lightning flashed upon the canvas, and high as the royals which crowned the towering fabric of cloths the sails flashed and faded in the electric play as though to the revolution of some gigantic violet-tinted lantern.

I kept my back upon Tom and seemed to be looking up at the sky; he stood with his right side toward me gazing aft as though he heeded me not. We spoke swiftly under our breath.

‘How is it with you, Tom?’

‘This coolness and freshness and moonlight—it is heaven after the hell below. My brave heart, my beloved girl, how is it with you?’

‘Well; I am happy. I am with you. Our time is coming. In our new home all this will be no more than a horrid dream.’

‘A dream!’ said he, with fierceness in his whisper. ‘It is no dream to be ruined and have one’s heart broken. They have made a devil of me. I am no longer fit for you. You don’t know my heart.’

‘Whatever you are, I am. If they have made you a devil I will be a devil too. I am yours and one with you, and live for nothing but for you. Ask me to set this ship on fire to-night and I’ll do it.’

‘Ay, yours is the true woman’s spirit. I have no right to such a love. It is too noble for a wretch. Don’t let them ruin two lives. Curse them! See what they have made of me! I would to God you were not here.’

‘Oh, Tom!’

‘Ay, but to see you dragging the dirty burthen of the cuddy along the deck—to think of my proud and beautiful girl masquerading as a boy—ordered about by wretches who would be glad to clean her doorsteps and windows at home—and for a convict! But you know I am innocent.’

‘Whisper softly,’ said I, marking a note of bitter temper, a tone as of ferocity in his speech. It hissed in his feverishly rapid whispers and seemed as a revelation to me of a change of nature. ‘Do not gesticulate; the sentry at the head of the poop-ladder

seems to be watching us. I have settled it thus: On our arrival I will take steps to qualify as a landholder, and you shall come to me. Leave me to act and keep up your heart, and do not say you wish I was not here.'

'This ship will never arrive!' said he.

'Why do you say that?' I whispered, turning to look at him and then giving him my back again.

'That's what I mean by wishing to God you were not here,' he answered, whispering passionately, as though he could not contain himself. 'This ship will never arrive! I could save her and I could save life by a word. If I thought you were in danger—but not with me! Not with me! Abram and others have taken their oaths upon it, and they cannot do without me. They don't know that you are a girl. They must not know it! You are my dear friend and that is enough; and they believe you to be friendly toward them and would help them if you could. They'll not harm you. I'd strangle myself sooner than utter a word

that should save this ship! I'm here for a crime I never committed. They have made a devil of me! I'll take no active part. I'll have no blood upon my head, but I'll help them in the way they want when they call upon me.'

'What can I do?'

'Nothing but wait.'

'I'd give my life to free you!'

'Oh, your devotion breaks my heart! I was worthy of it once.'

'When is this thing to happen?'

'The ship will be in the hands of the convicts to-morrow.'

I fetched a deep breath and turned cold.

'And Will—and Will, Tom?' I said in a whisper that shuddered with the icy fit.

'I have stipulated for Will. They'll not hurt him.'

'How will they be able to do it?'

'Some of the crew are with them. For three weeks this has been secretly working out. I'm the only navigator among the convicts, and they depend on me.' He added, after a pause, during which my breath came

and went hysterically : ‘ If you fear for yourself or for Will ; if you think this thing should not be done—for it will be attempted, and if it is attempted it will be done—go to the captain of the ship, tell him that the convicts, backed by a portion of his crew, have planned to seize the vessel, and that to save her the sentries must be doubled throughout, no convicts allowed on deck, no messmen to pass the main-hatch sentry, the prison victuals to be passed through the door of the steerage bulkhead by the soldiers, mates, and trustworthy petty officers of the ship.’

‘ Why should I tell him this ? ’

He was silent.

‘ Sooner than speak, I would fling myself into the sea.’

‘ It will be a bloody business.’

‘ But if it gives you your liberty ! ’

‘ They have driven me to it ! ’ he cried, raising his voice ; and he stamped on the deck in the passion of the minute.

‘ Gangway there ! ’ shouted the forecastle

sentry. 'What are you doing at that barricade? Come out of it!'

I instantly walked forward, and whilst I walked I heard the voice of the doctor on the poop.

'Let the people fall in. Let the captains rank them on the starboard side, where they'll get a good view.'

I went up the forecastle ladder, at the head of which stood the sentry. He was the husband of the pretty young woman—the Dick who had been on duty when I visited the barracks.

'Is it you?' said he. 'You mustn't get yarning with the convicts. It's against the orders.'

'Yarning!' said I. 'If a prisoner wishes me good-night and asks me questions about the moon, I may stop to be civil, I hope?'

'It's against the orders,' said he, and with a swing of his figure he resumed his walk.

The greater part of the crowd on the forecastle stood in the bows or head of the ship. The whole of the crew was assembled;

the soldiers' wives, some of them holding children by the hands, swelled the crowd. I stepped to a part of the fore-castle rail where the deck was vacant and looked out to sea. The hush on the ocean this side the storm was unutterably deep, and the distant tempest did not vex it, though the great masses of vapour had risen considerably and the lightning was running all over the breast of it in rills of fire, and the thunder boomed along the level plain of sea as though some leviathan mermen or Titans of the brine were playing at bowls upon the horizon.

I looked up at the moon and beheld the shadow of the earth touching the crystal edge of the satellite like a ring of smoke. The reflection flowed gloriously under the luminary in a spreading wake of greenish silver, whose hither extremity trembled to the vessel's side. The convict ship, sleeping upon the dark and breathless surface of water, her white sails gently fanning at long intervals to a delicate motion of the hull; the dark figures of the convicts grouped in a mass on one side of the main-deck, their

faces pale in the night-beam as they gazed at the moon ; the crowd of seamen and women talking in subdued voices in the bows of the ship, where beyond them soared the jibs floating like gossamer in the moonlight ; the dark ocean stretching, stirless and silent, into the north, star-studded, whilst southward it was lighted up by the distant, sunbright and violet flames of the electric clouds ; the face of the patient, silver moon, with a shadow of the earth painted in a corner of her—this was a scene so rich in poetry, so vital, besides, with a strange, bitter human significance, that at any other time I would have abandoned my whole spirit to it and lost myself in contemplation.

But I could think of nothing but my conversation with Tom, the change my quick ear had detected in his nature, his assurance to me that I did not know his heart—above all, his statement that before to-morrow night the ship would be in possession of the convicts. I believed him, but I could not realise his meaning. Yet I remember very well that conversation I had overheard between two

sailors who talked of the convicts, knowing that Tom—I guessed they meant Tom—was the only navigator among the prisoners.

I tried to settle my spirits, but my heart flung a fever into my blood and I longed to laugh out, to cry out, to run about. As the shadow deepened upon the moon, the crowd upon the forecastle fell silent. I looked over the side into the dark water and beheld a fish-shaped phantom of phosphorus sliding slowly along close under the surface; there was a little bubbling of fire about the centre of this strange shape where the fin of it projected. I knew what it was, yet glanced once or twice only without curiosity and went on thinking.

Would they spare my cousin Will? Would they spare me? How could Tom be sure? The liberation of the convicts would be like the disgorging of hell. How could Tom foretell what would follow the demons' seizure of the ship? But I cared not. Let Tom but gain his liberty and it mattered nothing to me what followed, though my own life should be forfeited. By

the magic of sympathy the change that I had noticed in him was working in me. I felt as though a devil had entered into me, even as Tom had whispered that they had driven him to it: that injustice and labour and punishment, maddening to an innocent heart, had made a devil of him.

I was in the way of the walk of the fore-castle sentry; that is to say, at the extremity of it, and twice he halted at my side to look at the moon, but never spoke. I heard the doctor talking to the prisoners. He addressed them from over the rail of the poop, and no doubt made the most of this solemn occasion of eclipse and the terror of the gathering storm and the mighty scene of loneliness in whose heart the ship slumbered.

I was forced to the quarter-deck presently by a ridiculous argument between the boatswain and the cook. The cook declared that it had long ago been proved that the earth was flat; therefore, as that corner of shadow upon the moon was round, it could not be cast by the earth. Mr. Balls, with a

loud, hoarse laugh, exclaimed that those who believed the earth to be flat were misled by the shape of their own heads.

‘Not that I’m a-going to argue,’ said he, ‘that that there shadder’s the earth’s. For the matter of that, who’s going to say it’s a shadder at all? The moon has a hatmosphere, I suppose, and why shouldn’t its hatmosphere be shaped as our’n is with mucky thicknesses like to what’s blazing away yonder? Who’s a-going to prove to me that that there shadder, instead of an eclipse, as they calls it, ain’t a storrum?’

I walked aft and sat upon the coamings of the booby-hatch where I was alone. A fresh division of convicts had been brought up, and the doctor stood over my head haranguing them. He spoke of the enormity of the crimes they had committed, and begged them to consider the moon as a likeness of their soul and the shadow overcreeping it as the darkness of sin and death. ‘But presently,’ said he, ‘that shadow will pass, and the brightness of the moon will look forth in splendour, and the sea beneath it will

smile and rejoice in her light. Be it even so with you, my brother sinners ; pray that the shadow that is upon you may pass away, that the light which is within you may purely shine again.'

CHAPTER XXXI

SHE DESCRIBES A STORM

BUT now the storm was approaching, the moon's light was growing weak and the stars over our mastheads dim and spare. The lightning was incessant; its flashes glanced into the remotest recesses of the north and brought out the horizon there in gleams of sulphur. The hum of the thunder was deep and ceaseless, with many savage cracks and rattling peals. I cannot tell what progress the eclipse had made by this hour; the moon hung distorted in the sky like a dim silver shield with its sides hacked, and the night looked wild with her and the gathering tempest.

I heard the commander of the ship address the doctor, who called to the captains of the division to march the prisoners below; and he added that the last of the divisions

could not be brought up, as sail was to be reduced and room was wanted. Moreover, in a very short time the moon would have vanished. Now followed a lively time. The prisoners' inclosure being clear, Mr. Bates, at the head of the poop-ladder, began to shout out orders ; all hands were on deck and all hands were wanted. 'Clew up the royals and furl them ! Down flying and outer jibs and topgallant staysails ! Clew up topgallant sails and furl them ! Main-clew-garnets and let the sail hang !' So ran the orders ; the lightning played upon the figures of the seamen as they trotted aloft ; the moon turned a watery, silvery, oozing, draining through the film of the advanced shadow of the storm, then vanished behind a jagged peak of cloud, and the night-dye sank upon the ocean in deepest shadow, the deeper for the play of the lightning ; after each flash the blackness thrilled with the blindness of the vision.

The women came off the fore-castle, and I entered the cuddy. The steward told me to turn up the lights, and Captain Barrett and Lieutenant Chimmo, descending the com-

panion-steps at that moment, called for brandy and seltzer, which I procured for them. The steward bade me be at hand ; if there was a gale of wind in the storm, I, with the rest of the ' idlers,' would be wanted. I hung about in the recess, and all the time I wondered whether the convicts would rise in the morning, whether their friends amongst the crew were to be depended upon ; whether this storm of thunder and lightning would work a change in the prisoners' intentions by terrifying them ; and I also strove to imagine the programme that had been concerted, what part the confederate seamen were to play ; whether the guard would find time to arm and turn out, and if so, whether the uprising would not be suppressed by their coolness and discipline and by the support of the loyal part of the crew.

The storm was now overhead ; the ship was clothed in lightning and the thunder was deafening and frightful. The whole fabric trembled to every explosion as though the broadside of a three-decker had been fired into her. There was no wind. The men had

come from aloft, and the ship stood motionless and upright under her three topsails, the courses hanging festooned in their gear. I crouched in a corner of the recess, amazed and bewildered. I had always from a child been frightened of lightning, and here now was lightning that was like one vast sheet of flame; the heavens were sheeted with its blinding blaze; it was so continuous that you saw the ship as by sunshine; the whole vessel crackled with sparks and explosions, fireballs ran down the chain-topsail sheets, played about the pumps, sparkled and snapped on the boom-irons at the yardarms, and the sea that had been silent roared back in echo to the thunder and spread out in a wide field of blue light that came and went, sometimes showing in a leap of light that was as the flash that it mirrored, then blackening for a breath or two, during which you saw nothing but the fireballs running over the ship.

It rained and hailed suddenly with incredible fury. The decks smoked; by the lightning flashes you saw the spray of the cataractal fall rising like steam to above the

height of a man. Just then the ship was struck; I heard a crash and splintering on high, and a great bulb of blue fire fell down the rigging over the side into the sea, where it burst like an exploded cannon. The mate overhead shouted, and the boatswain who was forward bawled in answer.

Captain Barrett and the subaltern stood at the cabin-table; they had emptied their tumblers and put down their cigars, and looked pale and glanced often up at the skylight, into which the lightning streamed in an almost continuous living dazzle. I hung in the cuddy door for shelter from the smoking wet; a head showed in the booby-hatch and cried out: 'The doctor wants some brandy; bring down half a tumblerful at once.' I ran to the table, took a glass from a swing tray, and half filled it with brandy. The steward at that moment coming up through the steerage-hatch called to me: 'Hi, you there! What are you about? Liquoring up unbeknown instead of being at your prayers?'

Lieutenant Chimmo grinned dismally.

‘The doctor’s in the barracks and wants brandy,’ said I.

‘Curse it, what’s wrong?’ exclaimed Captain Barrett, and instantly ran to the booby-hatch, followed by the subaltern.

‘Get on, then, get on!’ shouted Mr. Stiles, who had been drinking.

I ran with the brandy to the hatch, and seeing nobody to hand it to, descended. The scene of this interior of bulkheaded steerage was extraordinary; a lantern burnt dimly, its light was paled by the electric fires, which sparkled all over the prison bulkhead as though the wood was alive with the phosphoric lights of decay and rot. The bulkhead was studded with mushroom-headed nails, and every nail was tipped with fire. The sight was fearful; I thought the ship was burning. The women and the children were gathered in a heap in one corner, holding to one another, as though the vessel was about to founder; no child cried; the roar of the thunder seemed to have frightened the infants into silence.

A man lay on his back against the prison door, which was a little way open; the doctor

bent over him and Captain Barrett and the subaltern stood close looking down. Such of the guard as were below were grouped with the women and children ; they seemed dazed. The prostrate man was a soldier ; doubtless the sentry stationed at the prison door. His musket, with its fixed bayonet, lay at a little distance from him, and I saw threads of fire writhing upon the bayonet.

‘ Here’s the brandy ! ’ cried Captain Barrett.

The doctor looked up, and extended his hand for the glass. This brought me close to the door, and for a minute or two I had a clear view of the ’tweendecks prison. The cage-like barricade at the main-hatch was full of great nails, and every nail glowed as though red-hot. I don’t know where the lightning found entrance. It flashed through the blackness of this floating dungeon as if half a dozen hatches lay open to the sky. Wherever there was iron for the electric fires to catch hold of a small blue brilliant blaze was burning, inexpressibly wild and awful to behold. I clearly saw the whole sweep of the deck—the tiers of sleeping shelves stretching on either hand,

the tables, the bulkhead of the prison and whatever else there was of grim and odious furniture in that interior. Numbers of the convicts lay motionless upon their faces on the deck ; many crouched in squatting postures, with their hands to their heads ; a few stood erect, defiant, as though waiting and heedless of what was next to happen. One of these, I might be sure, was Tom.

No imagination could feign the terror which the figures of the prostrate and crouching convicts expressed. You needed to witness the scene, as I did, by the terrific lights that illuminated the prison and by the ceaseless glittering of the lightning streaming through the interior in shocks and explosions of dazzling light. And the roar of the thunder heard in this resonant cavity was more dreadful to listen to than the stupendous voice of it on deck, whilst a deep and ceaseless note was added to the detonations by the Niagara-like fall of hail and rain upon the echoing planks.

‘Is he dead, doctor?’ asked Captain Barrett.

‘No,’ said the doctor. ‘Have this door shut, sir, and let another sentry be posted. You can leave the brandy and go,’ said he to me; on which I returned to the cuddy and stood as before near the doorway.

I believe this terrible storm had reached the height of its rage when the ship was struck. Its fury was now waning, though the soot in the north continued to vomit sheets of flame and the thunder-shocks striking the level of the breathless sea were as the noise of the rending of mountains. I have heard of but one such another storm in which a convict ship bore part. The vessel was the *Earl Grey*, with two hundred and sixty-four prisoners on board. The year was, I believe, 1842, and the ship was bound, as the *Childe Harold* was, to Van Diemen’s Land. Dr. Browning, who was the surgeon-superintendent, mentions the storm in his account of the voyage, but he saw nothing of it, owing to his suffering from an affection of the heart which obliged him to keep his cabin. This I regret, as I should have been glad to know how the

prisoners under his charge behaved on that occasion.

It was now about a quarter to eleven ; the rain had ceased, but the decks were full of water, which cascaded continuously into the calm sea through the scupper-holes. The captain and his mates kept the poop. I heard the squelch of their tread as they tramped to and fro in their sodden boots. Suddenly an order was shouted, and in a few minutes two or three men came aft, one of them holding a lantern. They gathered about the pump and the second mate left the poop and joined them. I could not see what they did, but after a short interval the second mate went on the poop again, and the men, one of them swinging the lantern, walked forward.

A little clock hung under the break of the poop in the cuddy recess hard by the soldiers' arms ; a bull's-eye lamp cast a light upon its face ; this lamp was used for heaving the log, for writing up the log-slate and the like, and the clock for keeping the ship's bells. A figure came off the poop to see the

time ; he was draped in streaming oil-skins, which flashed out to the lightning, but his face was so muffled by his sou'-wester, that I looked two or three times before I knew him to be Will. I was still alone in the cuddy ; Frank and the steward were probably in the steerage ; I took a step or two that carried me to the door and pronounced Will's name.

He drew close and said : ' What do you think of this ? '

' It is awful,' said I.

' It might have been worse than awful ! ' he exclaimed. ' The ship has been struck ! Luckily, the thunderbolt went overboard. Had it gone through the bottom we should have followed it ; nothing could have saved us. But it's all right with the old hooker ; the well's just been sounded again and she's as dry as a rotten nut.'

I looked at him eagerly ; my heart all at once grew so full, that I felt I must speak or shriek out ; I set my teeth on my lip and bit till I tasted blood, and clenched my hands till my arms stiffened as though I had been poisoned, whilst I turned my head that he

might not see me. He said : ' I must be off. Why don't you go to bed ? There's nothing to keep you up. A fine night'll be coming along by eight bells and they'll be making sail.' With that he went up the ladder.

I had barely arrested speech in myself ; but for that supreme effort I should have warned him, and he would at once have carried the news to the captain.

I stood in the door, gazing at the ship that flashed out and vanished, no longer scared by the flames and the thunder. I could think of nothing but what to-morrow was to bring forth. Men in scores lay below in the prison quarter, stricken into motionless logs by fright. Were they and the like of them capable of a victorious uprising ? And suppose the ship seized, what was to follow ? I dared not think how the convicts might serve those who were not of them. I asked myself : If they put Tom in charge of the ship, what will he do with her, and how will he act so as to escape from the ruffians and secure his own liberty ? Then I thought to myself : he is an innocent man now, though

suffering as a criminal ; but if the ship is seized by the convicts, he'll be taken as having helped them, as being one of the two hundred and thirty, as being the one who navigated the ship afterwards, and who was as answerable as any of the rest for all that happened. He will then be a criminal in terrible earnest. Indeed, the business might bring him to the gallows. But then, thought I, he is a convict now in any case. He cannot be worse off. He never can—he never would—return home. Whatever happens cannot blacken his future. The darkness over which that lightning is flashing is not deeper. If the convicts rise, he may escape and get his liberty, free himself from his felon clothes, and hide with a changed name in a foreign country. Oh, cried my heart, God grant that I may be spared to escape with him wherever he goes !

Thus ran my thoughts. After all these years, I put them dully and coldly ; but they boiled in me then. They were as the electric fluid itself whilst I stood in the doorway of that cuddy, mechanically watching the great

fabric of the ship glancing out green and violet and yellow to the lights of the storm over the bow.

Shortly after eleven the sky cleared in the south; the clouds rolled away in black masses into the north, and the moon shone out, and the sea was again beautiful with her light. A soft wind blew and the decks grew busy with the life of seamen's figures running here and there, and pulling and dragging and making sail to the noise of hoarse cries and choruses. The steward lurched up to me, and his breath filled the atmosphere around with a smell of spirits. He said, with a hiccough: 'You can turn in.' So I went below and lay down, fully clothed, in my bunk, but not to sleep.

CHAPTER XXXII

SHE DESCRIBES THE SEIZURE OF THE SHIP BY
THE CONVICTS

My head was full of Tom, of that change into fierceness which I had noticed in his whispers, and I dwelt upon his sad, wild saying that I did not know his heart, by which he meant that his heart had been transformed by the wrong that had been done him and by his punishment and sufferings. Never had I felt madder than when I thought of him. I put my hands together, and prayed that if the convicts rose they would successfully seize the ship.

My blood was so hot and the heat of the atmosphere so great that I could not rest. I opened the porthole and put my face into it for the coolness of the air, and for a long while listened to the pleasant, rippling sounds of the water gently broken, and to the gush-

ing of water from the decks and the noise of men's voices high aloft, and sounding as though the tones came across the sea. The moon was on the other side, but the stars were again plentiful, many meteors sailed in delicate trails of light, and the sea-line ran black against the sheet lightning that played behind it. The dew-laden night-breath fanned my face and cooled me, and by this time having thought myself into some composure of mind I laid my head down and slept.

I was awakened by Frank; day had broken, and on looking through the porthole I saw that it was a fine clear morning, and that the ocean trembled with the brushing of a small wind. I might be sure that nothing had as yet happened; but I was so agitated, felt so cold and pale, that I expressly lingered, hoping to rally, till I suddenly heard the vulgar voice of Mr. Stiles bawling my name, on which I went out quickly.

‘Look here, young man,’ cried Mr. Stiles ‘if you’re a-going to skulk after this here fashion I shall have to send ye forward with a message to Mr. Balls. D’ye think I’m

a-going to do your work?' And for some time he continued to abuse me, calling me a little idle beast of a stowaway, a worthless, loafing young sojer, and the like. I glanced at him and perceived that his eyes were inflamed and his complexion of a strange unwholesome dye; he had evidently drunk heavily overnight in his terror, and the fumes of the drink were still in his head.

I gave him no heed, but went to my work as usual, and presently wanting water walked to the fore-castle for a bucketful instead of to the after-pump, as I wished to see what was going on forward. I took a bucket from the rack near the mainmast and went along the alley; a gang of convicts were scrubbing the maindeck and waist, and another gang were washing themselves in a row near the fore-and-aft barricade. The doctor, who always rose very early, almost as soon as the convicts turned out, stood at the quarter-deck gate looking at the prisoners cleaning the planks.

The last man in the line of those who were washing themselves was Barney Abram;

on catching my eye as he lifted his ugly face out of the bucket he smiled, winked and made a singular gesture, the significance of which I could not gather. His back was upon the captains or warders, and the look he gave me was unobserved. I faintly smiled as if I understood him, though I did not, and went on to the fore-castle.

The head pump was worked by one or two ordinary seamen; the others were passing buckets along to the boatswain and his mates on the main-deck. I delayed to press forward and fill my bucket, as I wished to look around me, and made as though I waited for a chance, in case I should be watched. The sun was up; the eastern sky was full of pink splendour. I saw no clouds, and the light wind was almost directly aft. The ship floated along very slowly. I had an eye by this time for sea-signs and guessed we should have a calm presently by the glassy appearance of the horizon. I heard men calling out on high, and, directing my eyes aloft, perceived that the main-topgallantmast had been wrecked to the height of the masthead—

that is to say, the royal yard still lay across, but the mast had been splintered just above it and showed a foot or two of ragged fangs.

One of the seamen near me said that a hot morning's job lay before them. Would they make an all-hand business of sending a new topgallantmast aloft?

The other answered: 'A brimstone hot job it's going to be, you take your haffidavy, matey! All [hands or no hands, a bleedin' hot job's afore some of us, roastin' as the lightning that's blasted that spar!' He laughed low and spat and wiped his lips on his wrist.

I knew the speaker by his voice as one of the two seamen whose talk I had overheard. The other stared up at the splintered topgallantmast. It was clear that he was not in the secret.

The sailor's extraordinary speech left me in no doubt that the attempt to seize the ship would be made, and soon. Not a hint of anything wrong, of anything brewing, was to be discovered. Never had the ship worn a quieter, peacefuller face as she floated along

this morning over the smooth, light blue of the tropic sea, bathed in the early silver sunshine, her canvas gleaming like silk, softly lifting and hollowing, and all right with her save that splintered masthead. They were washing down the poop; I saw Will and others hard at work with their scrubbing-brushes; a sentry stood at the head of each ladder, and the captain was now on deck looking up at the injured mast and talking about it with the ship's carpenter. A single sentry, as heretofore, stood at the quarter-deck gate, another at the main-hatch door, a third on the forecastle; thus the decks were guarded by five armed soldiers, as usual. Those who were off duty lounged with the women and a few children near the booby-hatch, waiting to get their breakfast. The convict cooks were at work in their galley, as I might guess from the smoke which blew from its chimney.

The fate of the ship was in my hands—her fate and the lives and fortunes of a crowd of people! A fierce, wild pride, a wicked exultation swelled my heart. There was yet

time ! The captain was on the poop ; I had but to measure the length of the deck to acquaint him with what I knew, and the ship would be saved. And sooner than speak, I would have killed myself. The blood would be on the heads of those who had unjustly sentenced and made a convict and a broken-hearted, ruined man of my sweetheart. Whatever devil had been driven into him was in me too ; what he did I would do ; what he wished would be my law ; let the change that had been worked in him be as frightful as you please, I would lay down my life that he might get his liberty and escape the horrors of the base and degrading term of servitude which he was to complete in a distant land. Yes, I could have saved the ship by whispering a single sentence in the captain's ear, and had a knife been put into my hand, and had I been compelled either to speak or to stab my heart, I vow to God I would have sheathed the knife in my breast without an instant's hesitation.

I was not more than five minutes upon the forecastle. Then drawing a bucket of

water, I went aft. Captain Barrett and Lieutenant Chimmo, as was their habit in these sultry latitudes, quitted their cabins in their dressing-gowns for a bath in the ship's head. This refreshing bath they obtained by standing under the pump, whilst their orderlies, as I suppose you would call the soldiers who waited upon them, plied the handle. They returned in twenty minutes, and disappeared in their cabins to dress.

I helped Frank to drape the breakfast-table, but every instant my eye was going toward the open door and windows which overlooked the quarter-deck. My hands trembled; I frequently let things fall; and three or four times Mr. Stiles swore at me for a clumsy young fool and threatened me with Mr. Balls. Frank asked me what was the matter, and I told him I supposed my nerves had been shaken by the storm.

I think it was about a quarter to eight when Captain Barrett and the subaltern emerged from their berths. As they walked to the companion-steps to go on deck, the captain and the doctor descended, and the

four came to a stand at the foot of the ladder and talked. I strained my ear. Their chatter was of the lightest—the weather, the wrecked topgallantmast, the soldier who had tumbled down in a fit and who was now well.

Suddenly Mr. Masters, who was on the poop—whether in charge of the watch or not, I can't say—put his head into the skylight and cried out in a voice loud with terror :

‘Captain Sutherland, the convicts are breaking out! Some of our men have knocked the forecastle sentry down! Quick on deck! The main-hatch sentry's overpowered and the prisoners are pouring up!’

Just as he spoke a musket was fired—then a second. Some of the women shrieked. A third musket was fired. This was followed by an indescribable roaring noise of groans and yells, accompanied by the sound of the tread of many feet. The captain and the doctor rushed on deck, the two military officers to their cabins, out of which they broke again in a twinkling, each man pulling a pistol out of its case as he ran toward the

companion-way and flinging the case down as he bounded up the steps.

‘Here they are!’ shouted the steward, and, followed by Frank, he fled to the steps which led to the poop.

A mass of the convicts were coming toward the recess where the soldiers’ arms were. Gaining the steerage hatchway in a leap or two, I rushed into my cabin, and as I closed my door and bolted it I heard the prisoners shouting as they swarmed into the cuddy. Their footsteps thundered over my head. I saw myself in the washstand looking-glass, and was as white as milk. I was only sensible now of the horror that had seized me at the sight of the faces of the convicts. I stood with my hand upon my heart, holding by the side of the upper bunk, breathing fast and listening. But voices could not pierce the thickness of the deck-plank. Nothing took my ear but the confused tread and shuffling movements of feet overhead like to what I had heard when I lay in hiding, only softer because of the carpets.

A horrid fancy seized me. Shots had been

fired. Suppose Tom had been wounded or killed ! The handle of the door was violently tried and the door shaken and beaten upon. I cried out : ‘ Who’s that ? ’

‘ Will Johnstone ! Let me in ! ’

I rushed to the door and opened it, and Will entered. In the time that the door lay open I heard a great shouting and hoarse roaring, distant, as though a fierce struggle were happening on the main-deck, likewise a single musket-shot. This I heard whilst I let Will in. He was deadly white ; his eyes were large and strange with a wild stare of horror.

For some moments he could utter no words.

‘ Are you hurt ? ’ I exclaimed.

‘ No, but I have seen—but I have seen—oh, the bloody villains ! One stabbed Chimmo in the throat, and they threw him overboard alive. He levelled his pistol and shot a man. He was mad to do it. He stood no chance. They wrenched the musket out of a sentry’s hand and bayoneted him and tossed him into the sea, alive like the subaltern.’

Horror overcame the poor fellow. The

memory of the shocking sights seemed to paralyse him ; his jaw moved, but he ceased to speak. I was horror-stricken too, but not as he, for he had beheld what he described. But impatience was rending my heart ; I could not give him time.

‘Have you seen Tom?’

He answered with a nod.

‘Is he safe?’

The poor lad dryly swallowed and wiped his blanched lips and said huskily : ‘Yes ; he told me to run to this cabin and keep with you. He’ll be here soon. He stays to save Mr. Bates’s life.’

‘The convicts will not hurt us,’ said I. ‘Tom stipulated for our safety.’

‘I guessed that,’ he exclaimed. ‘When they rushed upon the poop they struck out and stabbed to right and left of them, but none offered to hurt me. Butler stood on the ladder where the sentry had been bayoneted.’

‘He didn’t do it?’ I shrieked.

‘No ; it was a young convict with a purple face, who kept yelling like a madman.

Butler stood on the ladder and shouted to me, and I ran to him. He put his arm round my neck and said: "Will, it's a bloody business. I could have stopped it by peaching, but they would have killed me; and what was to become of Marian?" A line of convicts was drawn across the quarter-deck, and they saw Butler with his arm round my neck. He told me that he had seen you run into the steerage and that I should find you in your cabin.'

He was now beginning to breathe with more freedom, and something of the dreadful, staring look was passing out of his eyes. He listened and then said: 'They'll not hurt us. Butler seems to have authority. Did he plan this frightful business?'

'No, but he would not hinder it. Why should he? He's an innocent man, and must have his liberty. Let those who swore his freedom away, who sentenced him, who have ruined our lives and made him what he is, be responsible for this.'

'It couldn't have happened,' he exclaimed, 'but for our men. Many of them are as vile

as the worst of the convicts. I was on the poop and saw it all, and it was as quickly done as letting go a topsail-halliards. The prisoners' messmen massed themselves as usual past the main-hatch at breakfast-time ; I noticed some of our sailors loafing near the convicts' galley within leap of the main-hatch sentry. I also saw a cluster of seamen standing close in the way of the forecastle sentry's walk. I heard a loud shout ; I'll swear it was the prize-fighter's voice. In an instant the forecastle sentry was knocked down by the seamen ; the main-hatch sentry was seized from behind and disarmed by the sailors who rushed from the convicts' galley. The messmen threw down their breakfast utensils as a sort of second signal ; I watched and saw it all, Marian ; quicker than I can talk the convicts on deck made for the quarter-deck barricade-gate, and fast as water pours through a scupper-hole the prisoners came streaming up out of their quarters. The quarter-deck sentry levelled his piece and fired, and a convict dropped. The convicts forced the gate ; the sentry bayoneted the

first of them and was then knocked down ; his musket was wrested from him, and a brutal ruffian beat his head in with the stock as the poor fellow lay on his back. The poop sentries fired at the convicts as they burst through the barrier, but in a few moments the prisoners got possession of the arms in the recess and swarmed up by either ladder. Oh, it was a splendid, maddening, frightful sight to see those two soldiers, one at each ladder, holding the steps against the yelling mob until one was beaten down and killed as I have told you ! ’

‘ Hark to the noise overhead ! ’ I cried. ‘ The cuddy is full of men ! ’

Through the open porthole came faintly, like voices at a distance across the water, sounds of the shouting on deck. The wind had dropped. A sheet calm had fallen. Through the cabin window I saw the sea stretching to its dim, hot confines in a vast spread of soft silver blue, with scarce a breathing of swell to stir the ship.

‘ What have they done with the captain ? ’ I asked.

‘As I ran to join Butler, a crowd of convicts gathered round the captain and doctor, as though to force them off the poop. I don’t think they hurt them.’

I asked some other questions. He had rallied, and now talked with something of composure.

‘Hush!’ cried he suddenly. ‘There are people outside.’

The door of the cabin next mine was beaten. Mine was then hammered on.

‘Are you there, Johnstone?’

It was Tom, and in a heart-beat I threw open the door. Beside him stood Mr. Bates, the chief officer of the ship. On my showing myself, Tom extended his arms and gathered me to his breast and held me tight. I broke into a little passion of sobs, but shed no tears.

‘You are free,’ I cried, drawing from him and grasping his hands and looking into his dear eyes.

‘Not yet! Not yet!’ he answered hoarsely, as though his voice had been strained by shouting. ‘But, dear heart, we

are together and may talk together now. Mr. Bates, step in.'

They were alone. He shut the door when the mate entered.

'This is Marian Johnstone, the lady I was to have married, the lady who accompanied me on board this ship in the East India Docks. She followed me into this accursed vessel and, herself a woman of wealth and a lady by birth, has waited at your table, stooped to the vile drudgery of the cuddy, worked like a convict, associated with men no better than convicts, that she might be in sympathy with me in my degradation. May she find a reward!' he cried, raising his hands and speaking in a broken voice. 'Do you stare, Mr. Bates? Why, yes, to be sure; she was a boy and a cabin bottle-washer to your habit of thought down to a minute ago. But the secret of her sex is yours. This is her cousin, Will. Sir, on your honour, this lady is still a boy amongst us, and you know nothing. Consider our company. Give me your hand upon it.'

Mr. Bates extended his hand, and Tom

grasped it. The mate was a man of a somewhat slow turn of mind. He looked at me hard whilst he retained his grasp of my sweetheart's hand, and said : ' I have been thinking as much for some time. There never was a boy with your skin and eyes. Butler's a lucky man ! '

' A wronged man ! ' I cried.

' I said so when I read the papers, and I've been saying it ever since aboard this ship, as you know, Johnstone.'

' She shipped as Simon Marlowe,' said Tom, ' and so she remains—that's understood. Mr. Bates, you stop here with her and Johnstone. I'll bring Abram and others presently. The wolves are tearing the cuddy to pieces in their rage to eat and drink. No man'll harm you as my friend. You three are my friends—friends ! ' he cried, and again he took me in his arms and held me to him, then passionately broke away and said, speaking fast and harshly and with a fierceness I had noticed in his whispers : ' They'll not hurt you ! The devils are helpless without me.

There's not a navigator amongst them. It was concerted I was to take charge, and I do so on my own terms.'

'What have they done with the captain?' cried Mr. Bates.

'He's in the prisoners' quarters along with the doctor and Captain Barrett and the survivors of the guard. I fear the bad part of your sailors more than the convicts. There must be no bloodshed. But let them yell and roar. Give the mad spirits of the brutes time to languish. They have their liberty, but it is not the liberty of the shore, and they'll not know what to do with it presently when they sober down and look around. Marian, my brave heart!' For the third time he pressed me to him and stepped out, bidding us leave the door unbolted and to stay till he returned.

His face was white, hard and wild; his manner that of one who is full of rage and whose struggle to command it fills his eyes with the light of madness. Mr. Bates gazed at me when the door closed upon my sweetheart, and, plunging his hands in his pockets, said: 'I owe him my life. He locked me in

my cabin, and a number of the convicts were forcing the door when he thrust through and brought me out. He shouted: "Men, I have three friends; two are youngsters below, this is the third. You know our compact. You know who this man is. You have seen him often enough. He is an old shipmate of mine and a friend, and if a hair of his is harmed, you sail the ship yourselves." The cuddy was full of convicts; but there fell a silence whilst he roared this out. He has a noble voice. He put his arm through mine and walked me to the hatch. The devils fell away from me and started shouting on other matters, as though I was out of it and concerned them no longer. He saved my life. They've killed poor Masters. They would have killed me.'

'Is the second mate dead?' gasped Will.

'Butler told me so. Masters showed fight when they killed the sentry and rushed on to the poop, and he was cut down. So Butler told me as we came here. The convicts got hold of the soldiers' arms, and it was all done out of hand. And what's to become of the ship?'

‘What will they do with the captain and the doctor?’ said Will.

‘How many have been killed?’ I asked.

‘Three convicts were dropped by the sentries,’ answered Will. ‘Suppose them dead. Then two soldiers. Then the lieutenant and Mr. Masters. The tally’ll run to near half a score, sir,’ said he, looking at the mate.

‘And you’re a cousin of this lady?’ said Mr. Bates.

‘I’m no lady on board this ship. Pray take heed, sir!’ I cried.

‘She has nothing to do with this business!’ cried my cousin. ‘She was afraid of losing sight of Captain Butler if she followed him in another ship.’

The poor man durst not ask questions, for fear of offending me.

‘What noise is that?’ cried Will.

I heard a kind of pounding, like the stroke of a pump or the hitting of timber. Mr. Bates put his head out of the door to listen. A dull, confused tumult of voices came down the hatch—wild cries as of mad or drunken delight; but I seemed to catch a level note

in the hubbub, and supposed that the first delirium and wild-beast-like transports were passing.

Mr. Bates was about to shut the door, when he was arrested by a noise of rushing feet. He looked out, and said: 'Here's a mob of convicts streaming into the steerage!'

I pushed past him and took the door-handle from his grasp, opened the door wide, and stood in the way. The convicts were abreast of me in a moment, twenty or thirty of them. They shouted as they ran, using language which has gone from my memory. I guessed they had come to sack the cabins down here, from the nature of their shouts one to another; but they roared so hoarsely, their oaths were so plentiful and unintelligible, their speech so hard to understand, some of them being of the provinces, that I could only conjecture their designs. My voice, though contralto, was piercing and clear. I cried out: 'Do you know who we are?'

'Ain't they Butler's lot?' shouted one of them.

'Yes, the three of us,' I cried. 'He'll be

here in a moment, along with Barney Abram. We're keeping out of the muddle above till you've found out who's your friends.'

'It's the spunky young devil as jawed the doctor,' said a voice.

'This is my cabin,' said I. 'There's nothing to take in it. But what's your friend's, he keeps, don't he? Look here! I've been with you, if not of you, and tasted every joy of yours but your irons, curse them!' and with a swaggering, bouncing, rollicking manner I sprang to my bunk and pulled out the convict mattress and pillow and flung them on the deck. 'No. 240,' I cried, pointing, and forcing a shout of laughter.

Some of the convicts echoed that insane burst of merriment. Their laughter was hideous with its note of raw hoarseness.

'What's that bundle there?' cried one of them, a heavy-jawed, low-browed ruffian.

'Skins and yacks and dummies is it, my bulger? Where's your pal?' cried another man.

'Show out! Show out!' roared a third voice.

‘It’s woman’s clothes. Look and then let them be,’ I cried, still preserving my bouncing, dare-devil air.

They were elbowing in; the atmosphere was sickening with the fellows’ warm, hard breathing. Many of them, I judged, had got at the cuddy stock of liquor. Will and the mate stood side by side in a corner. Never shall I forget the show of faces that confronted me; men with broken noses; one with a hare-lip; one with a diabolical squint. Some were gray, two or three a flaming red. But the features and colour counted for nothing; their looks were devilish and horrible, and the prevailing expression an infuriate triumph of the basest spirits, inflamed by drink and animated yet by the brutal and maddening lust of plunder.

At this instant I heard Tom’s voice at the back of the crowd. He cried out: ‘Is this fair? Is this how their promises are to be kept? What have they done? Abram, help me to clear this cabin.’

The rearmost of the convicts were violently twisted out of the doorway; as Tom forced

his way in, the fellows reeled to the thrust of his elbows. Abram was shouting : ‘ Out, you cub ! A bargid’s a bargid. You’ve no right here ! ’ And whilst he shouted he lay about him, and some of the men absolutely flew before the prodigious thrust of his arm, tumbling others down as they bounded, until perhaps a dozen of the felons lay sprawling in the passage outside the cabin door, cursing, roaring, laughing and filling the place with the infernal din of a madhouse.

‘ Is it all right with you, Marlowe ? ’ cried Tom passionately.

‘ All right,’ I answered, ‘ and right also with our two friends.’

‘ Dow look here ! ’ exclaimed Barney Abram, whom I did not instantly recognise, for he had removed his convict clothes and wore a long pea-coat, cap and trousers belonging to Captain Sutherland. ‘ Look here ! ’ he exclaimed, addressing the convicts, who stood in a crowd at the cabin door. ‘ Our agreebet with Butler was that his two yug freds was to be let alode. It was probised. Why dote you keep your word ? D’ye dow

where y' are? You're at sea, and there's dot a bad you cad trust the ship to but Butler,' and here he put his immense hand upon Tom's shoulder. 'There's a third party he's asked our kideness for. He shall have it. We owe hib do grudge. The chief bate of this ship's always beed a quiet bad. Did ady bad ever hear hib slig a hard word at a prisoder? He's Butler's fred, ad that's edough. Butler's our fred, ad'll carry you in safety to where you bay scatter. Ate that what you want?'

'We never came 'ere to 'urt 'em,' said one of the convicts.

'D'ye know them now?' shouted Tom. 'Look, and tell all hands of you, fore and aft, that these three are my friends and are not to be molested. If they are not well used by you all, if the smallest injury befalls them through any one of you, I instantly chuck the job of navigating the ship. You may threaten me; you may torture me; you may hang me. I'll fling the navigating instruments overboard, and leave the ship to drown you on a lee shore or to run foul of an English man-of-war.'

I cannot express the savageness with which he spoke; the hatred and contempt with which he surveyed the crowd of ugly rascals.

‘That’s plaid English! Are you satisfied?’ cried Barney Abram, clapping his hands on his thighs and stooping and howling his words at them.

‘Come along, bullies! No use wasting time here!’ cried a voice.

In a moment the convicts broke away. They burst into the cabin next door and filled the pantry, and I heard them laughing and yelling as they flung the food they found at one another and dashed the crockery against the bulkhead. Tom shut the door.

‘Ad ’ow are you, yug gentlebud?’ said Abram, offering me his hand. ‘So the doctor wadted to bake be your pal, eh? He preaches a good serbud,’ he added, shutting one eye and looking at Mr. Bates. ‘What d’ye thik of this, sir, for a piece of orgadisatiod? Is it prettily badaged?’

‘It is grandly managed,’ said I, answering for the mate, who seemed incapable of speech,

and who stood staring at the repulsive, massive, small-poxed face and wonderful figure of the prize-fighter with looks of dread and aversion. 'You, Mr. Abram, will have been the genius of this splendid stroke.'

'I thik I bay claib to 'ave 'ad a small 'ad in it,' he answered, with an indescribable smirk of self-complacency, as he gazed at Tom.

'Hark at those brutes outside!' cried my sweetheart. 'There'll be no navigation, there'll be nothing to be done with the ship if those hell-hounds are not to be brought under some sort of government.'

'You bust let theb howl it out of theb-selves. They've got at the drik and that's dot going to quiet 'eb,' said Abram. 'Perhaps sub of theb will be jubping overboard presedly, or going for each other with the soldiers' sballarbs; we're rather duberous.'

He spoke with a great affectation of gentility and superiority. At any other time I should have burst into a fit of laughter at the fellow's grotesque, genteel air, coupled with the indescribable leering smirk of self-

complacency that was fixed upon his pitted face.

‘Captain Butler, what use can you make of me?’ said Mr. Bates, finding his voice on a sudden. ‘I owe you my life, and I want to prove myself grateful, and I want to show myself grateful for Mr. Abram’s friendship and protection.’

‘Let Mr. Bates go and take charge of the deck,’ said Tom, looking at Abram.

Abram, with a cunning grin, shook his head. ‘Trust the ship to wud of her bates! Reckon that he’s going to steer you to the port agreed upod for our dispersal? He’ll wait upod you!’ said Abram.

‘The ship must be watched,’ said Tom. ‘Suppose a squall should burst down upon us! Suppose something with paddle-wheels and a white pennant flying should heave into sight!’ he added with an oath which I had never before heard in his mouth, and looking Abram fiercely in the face as he spoke. ‘How am I to teach these wretches common-sense? The ship must be watched!’ he shouted. ‘Am I to be your only man? Is it to be

a twenty-four-hours' look-out with me day after day until I bring you in sight of the land we agree to make? Bates, you are still first mate of this ship under me. You won't go wrong. You'll have no chance. I'd blow out the brains of any man who'd imperil the liberty I've regained this morning!'

His eyes flashed, his face filled with blood, he took a step and put his arms round my neck and stood so, scarcely sensible, it seemed to me, of what he did.

'I'll back you, Tom!' said I. 'The liberty you've this day got you'll keep.'

Abram burst out laughing. I felt, and was amazed to feel Tom's influence over this ruffian.

'Your little fred's got the spu'k, Butler,' said he. 'A bugful of it wouldn't hurt that lad there,' he continued, nodding at Will.

'He is my cousin,' said I. 'Don't question his courage. He's fresh from seeing men butchered and thrown alive overboard. You are the greatest fighter in all England, with the finest endurance and pluck of any man

that ever entered a ring; therefore, Mr. Abram, you have a soft heart. Courage and kindness go hand in hand. Bear with that lad. He is horror-stricken.'

'Do deed for such sedsatioids, by warbler,' said the prize-fighter, grinning with gratification and stepping up to Will. 'Give us your arb. I'll take yours, Bates. Dow let's step od deck. I wadt air ad a drink.'

CHAPTER XXXIII

SHE DESCRIBES THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE
CONVICTS

ON their going out, Tom shut the door and locked it, then, catching me in his arms, called me by twenty caressing words and kissed and blessed me for my love and devotion. I cried and lost my self-control, and some time elapsed before we were composed enough to talk. He then spoke of the *Arab Chief*, and told me again how the conspiracy against him had been contrived. His face blackened and he turned motionless with wrath when he mentioned Rotch and the other. I see him now after he had said: ‘Marian, I swear by and before the great and just and merciful God of Heaven that I am as guiltless of the crime for which I am here as you, and that Rotch and Nodder——’ Then he stopped. He stood without a stir,

his face blackened, and his eyes became enlarged and fixed. Nothing moved but his lips, which convulsively opened and shut. His expression was one of horror and dreadful rage.

I was terrified, and threw my arms round his neck and kissed him. He fetched two or three deep sighs, and picked his convict cap out of the upper bunk and fanned himself with it. He then quickly rallied, but turned as deadly pale as his looks had before been black and terrible, and held me by the hand a minute, watching me with a smile of heart-moving sadness. ‘But God will not suffer it! But God will not suffer it!’ he muttered brokenly; and a minute later, in a collected voice, he talked to me of his sufferings in the London jails, of what he had endured on board the hulk and in the dockyard.

I strove to bring him away from these maddening memories by speaking of myself, but I presently saw it did him good to let loose his thoughts.

Meanwhile, a second mob of convicts, attracted by the noise below, had come down

into the steerage and were swelling the chorus of yells and oaths which the felons were roaring out. I heard a frequent splintering of wood, as though drawers and doors and lockers were being forced and smashed. The ruffians' object, unless it were diabolic wantonness, I could not imagine; the cabins there were few. One was full of some kind of stores; then there was the pantry; the other berths were empty; maybe the villains beat and splintered the woodwork and did what injury they could with the tools they handled out of rage and spite at being baulked in their hunt for booty.

'Do they mean to wreck the ship?' said I.
'Are they men or beasts? Listen to them!'

'They're beasts! Don't I know! But why do they shout and roar? After the long discipline of silence, I could roar myself. It has made a devil of me.'

'What you are, I am,' said I.

He shook his head passionately, and said: 'My business will be to get out of this ship with you quickly. They trust me, and their trust will be my opportunity. How long

should I keep you in this ship of demons? There's Bates and there's young Johnstone. I have a scheme. The three of us are sailors.'

'Are the convicts without any chiefs, without any head they are willing to own? If there's no discipline, what must happen? They'll get at the liquor; they'll eat and waste the provisions; they'll knock the ship to pieces and sink her. Is that the wretches' idea of liberty?'

'There are heads; Abram's one. There are others I needn't name. I'm supposed to be one, as taking charge of the ship. They'll fall into some sort of order by-and-by. Many of them are not wholly beasts, and they'll understand for their lives' sake what's wanted and what must be done. Marian, I had no hand in this business. They asked me if I'd navigate the ship if the prisoners seized her. I said yes, and that that would be my share in the outbreak. I'd do no more; I'd have no man's blood upon my head. If they seized the ship, good and well; I'd navigate her to any agreed part of the world. Understand

me, Marian, I am accountable for no life that has been lost to-day. What is that bundle?’

I explained.

‘The clothes may prove useful,’ said he. He pointed to the convict’s mattress on deck and said; ‘Has that been your bed?’

‘Yes, dear.’

He tossed his hands and looked at me with a face of sorrow and love, then put the parcel into my bunk and the mattress on top of it.

‘They’ll give me the captain’s cabin,’ said he, ‘and you must be near me. I couldn’t rest to think of you sleeping down here. The men’ll be filling these cabins; they’ll sleep in bowlines over the side sooner than occupy the prisoners’ quarters, though many of them’ll have to live down there all the same. Come with me on deck. I must see what’s doing.’

‘Be careful how you address me, Tom. I must be thought a boy whilst I am in this ship.’

We went out, and he locked the door after him and gave me the key. He shouted to the convicts, some of whom seemed to be dancing,

others playing at leap-frog, whilst others again ran in and out of the pantry and cabins hallooing like madmen: 'Let no man enter that berth! My friend occupies it, and that's enough!' He then passed his arm through mine, and we walked to the steps of the hatch that led into the cuddy.

I never could have imagined such a scene as this interior presented. Most of the tall, thin sheets of looking-glass had been shivered. The doors of the cabins lay open, and the decks were covered with the tossed and tumbled contents of rifled drawers, lockers, and boxes. The convicts had found good booty in these cabins. Here had slept the captain, the two mates, the military officers, and the surgeon-superintendent, and one or two spare berths aft had been filled with certain valuable consignments to Sydney, to which port the ship was to have proceeded after discharging her cargo of criminals at Hobart Town.

The place was crowded with the felons. They stood two and three deep at the table, which, as you will remember, I and my associate had prepared for breakfast. One of the

aftermost berths had been used as a cabin larder ; here the prisoners had found plenty to eat and drink. The table was strewn with tins of meat, pots of preserves, bottles of beer, biscuits, bones of ham, and so forth. The fellows bawled to one another to pass this and that ; to hand the ale along ; to sling that bottle of sherry across. They knocked the heads off the bottles and, after emptying them, threw them on the deck.

The drink had mounted into the heads of many, and the din of their shouts, songs, and laughter, their filthy language and hideous raillery, would have drowned the noise of a thunderstorm. Here and there lay portions of convicts' clothes torn into shreds. Many of the felons were dressed in plundered apparel. A man at the foot of the table wore the doctor's naval coat ; others the clothes which had belonged to Lieutenant Chimmo and Captain Barrett. A few had attired themselves in the uniforms of these officers, one in a tunic, another in the trousers, a third in a military cloak. One fellow who ran past us had the subaltern's sword strapped to his hip.

‘Which was the captain’s cabin?’ said Tom.

We looked into it; it had been sacked like the rest; the lockers opened and the contents looted; the lid of a large sea-chest was smashed as though by a chopper; but they had left the nautical instruments alone, perhaps guessing their importance. The chronometers were safe; there were sextants in their cases on a shelf; the nautical books of reference were untouched; but the charts had been emptied out of their bags, as though the convicts supposed more was to be found inside them than rolls of paper.

We stepped on to the main-deck. The barricades had been beaten down, and the decks were covered with chips and fragments of timber. I now understood what had occasioned the pounding noise I had heard. A dreadful stain of blood marked the spot where the quarter-deck sentry had been felled. A couple of convicts stood with muskets and fixed bayonets at the main hatch. Some food and bottles of beer were beside them, and they drank and ate, and chatted in harsh

syllables. The doors and barricade arrangements here had been demolished. Gratings covered the hatch. The cage-like bars which descended to the lower-deck, with the doorway to admit of the passage of but one man at a time, still remained. I supposed that the door in the steerage bulkhead was secured and guarded.

Thirty or forty convicts lingered about this part of the ship. They seemed the quietest portion of the vile rabble. They hung in groups or marched up and down in little gangs. Some were dressed in the clothes of the soldiers. Others, again, wore the jackets and coats of the seamen and soldiers. It was clear that the forecastle and barracks had been stormed and plundered, though possibly the chests of the loyal portion of the crew only had been rifled.

I looked about me for the sailors, and counted five or six talking to a little crowd of convicts near the ship's galley. I saw nothing of Mr. Balls nor the other petty officers of the vessel. Tom said he supposed they had been driven below with the orderly

part of the crew and were in the prisoners' quarters together with the captain, the doctor, Captain Barrett, the survivors of the guard, the women, and others.

There might have been fifty or sixty convicts upon the poop. I spied Will standing beside a convict right aft. I took the man to be a convict until I had stared awhile, and then I saw it was Mr. Bates, the chief mate, who had evidently been forced to change clothes with a felon. Will, however, was dressed as usual. The wheel was deserted. The calm was profound; the sea flat and sheeting into the dim, hot distance like a surface of quicksilver. The sun was now high and pouring in splendour into the vast mirror of the deep, and his light was stinging with heat, early as the hour yet was.

A convict, flushed with drink, reeled up to me and shouted: 'Here's one that ain't of us! Change clothes, my beauty! Off with them duds!' and he pulled at his own coat in a drunken, wrestling way to remove it.

Tom took him by the throat, and, running him backward until he was abreast of the

convicts' galley, flung him into the door with a bitter curse, and the fellow fell with a crash. My sweetheart shouted to the mob of convicts who stood near the ship's galley with the sailors :

‘Keep that drunken ruffian off me or I shall kill him! D’ye know my compact? If this lad is touched or hurt’—and he stepped back to put his hand on my shoulder, whilst he roared out these words in a voice of fury—‘you shall sail the ship amongst you! You shall run her ashore and drown every mother’s son aboard! You shall run her into a man-of-war, and find as many gibbets as you have necks!’

As he spoke, the drunken convict staggered out of the galley with blood on his face from his nose; he cursed wildly and incoherently, and was approaching Tom in a fighting posture.

‘It’s all right, Butler,’ bawled a felon, ‘get away aft to your quarters and look to the ship!’

‘It’s time!’ cried a seaman, and as this was said three of the convicts sprang upon

the drunken convict and thrust him back into the galley.

‘Lie there!’ roared one of them. ‘Seizing the ship ain’t getting our liberty, curse you!’

Tom took my arm and we went toward the poop. I was terribly frightened. I shuddered and trembled, and said: ‘Where shall I find some convicts’ clothes? Think if I should be forced to change when you were not by to stop it!’

He halted at the foot of the poop-ladder and said: ‘Put this on and give me yours,’ and pulled off his convict coat. It was large and loose, and a more effectual disguise than Will’s serge jacket or my monkey-coat. It was Will’s serge that I handed Tom. He found it small and tossed it to a young convict who stood grinning at us whilst we changed coats.

‘I’ll find clothes when I want them,’ said he, and I followed him up the ladder.

There were several stains of blood about the poop-deck. The sight made me ill. Tom saw the sickness in my face and exclaimed:

‘The heat is too much for you. Go aft to your cousin ; I’ll join you in a minute.’ He then, standing at the brass rail, shouted : ‘Aft, a couple of hands, and spread the awning ; and lay aft a hand to the wheel ! Do you hear ?’

Strained as his voice had been by previous exertion, it still rang clear and high, and went through the ship with the carrying note of a bell. I paused when he shouted, and took notice that the convicts on the poop, who were as fairly orderly as the fellows in the waist, looked pleased on hearing him utter this command.

He followed me, and we joined Mr. Bates and Will. Despite my sickness, I found a difficulty in holding my face when I viewed Mr. Bates dressed as a convict. He immediately said, addressing me : ‘I see they have figged you out, also, but not to the heels, as I am. A fellow laid hold of me, though Abram had my arm with Johnstone on t’other side to let the gentry see that we were friends. Abram said : “Change with him.

You'll be safer in that dress and they'll like you the better in it."'

'He's right,' said Tom.

Two sailors came aft to loose the little awning; a third man approached the wheel. He looked hard at Mr. Bates and burst into a laugh. The mate wisely turned his back upon him to conceal his temper, and held his peace.

It was no moment then to resent an insult, though this scoundrel seaman had been in Mr. Bates's watch since the beginning of the voyage, and, with the rest of the sailors, had always been well used by him. Tom stepped up to the fellow and exclaimed in a tone of severity that made the man shrink: 'I suppose that you know I am the commander of this ship now?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And I suppose you know that you are an infernal mutineer?'

The man stared at him in a hang-dog way; he was the fellow who had spoken on the forecastle that morning about the roasting job which lay before them.

‘My command,’ continued Tom, hissing his speech into the sailor’s face, ‘gives me unlimited power, and if I insist upon your being hanged, up you go! Mr. Bates is second in command, and he is your chief mate still. Laugh again if you dare!’

He lingered to stare at the man, who shuffled, spat, looked uneasily around him, but made no reply.

‘Bear a hand with that awning, then,’ shouted my sweetheart to the two seamen. ‘Larking, Jephson, Simmonds,’ he cried, addressing some of a knot of convicts who stood looking at the sailors, ‘help those two loafers, will ye? Show ’em what to do, and how it may be done quickly. We’ve been having our training, boys,’ he added, with a great violent laugh, ‘whilst those chaps have been a-bed sucking their pipes.’

Three of the convicts sprang to his orders, as sailors would to the command of an officer. I caught Mr. Bates staring at Tom with amazement and admiration. Just then Barney Abram, dressed in Captain Sutherland’s clothes, the brass button on either side the

naval peak of his cap glittering in the sun, came out of a group of eight or ten of the felons, who had been earnestly and soberly talking abreast of the foremost quarter-boat, and walked up to us.

‘Dow, Butler,’ he said, ‘we wa’t your advice. The idea was to se’d the fellows below adrift. But can we spare the boats?’

The others of the select crew he had been talking to followed him and came about us. The crowd was quickly swelled; before Tom could fairly answer, the whole of the convicts on the poop were swarming aft to the wheel, near which we stood, to hear what was said.

Tom, standing erect, folded his arms upon his convict shirt and, gazing fixedly at the prize-fighter, said: ‘I’ll not counsel you. I accept no responsibility where life is concerned. That was understood.’

‘You cad give us ad idea?’

Tom shook his head. ‘You have put this ship into my hands and I’ll carry her where you will,’ said he. ‘I’ve got no ideas outside that.’

I heard some murmurs as of grumbling, and some of the ugly faces looked savage.

‘You may growl as you please,’ said Tom, running his eyes angrily along the crowd of felons. ‘I’ve agreed to undertake as much as you have a right to expect. In agreeing to take charge, I convert myself into head criminal aboard you here ; and of you all, I’m the surest to be hanged if we’re taken. Act as you please. Do what you like. My part’s big enough, isn’t it?’

‘Yar might just answer a question!’ exclaimed a convict.

‘You want to turn the people below adrift,’ said Tom to Abram. ‘Do so.’

Mr. Bates looked at the sultry, breathless expanse of ocean ; I caught his eye and witnessed horror and consternation in it.

‘How bany boats are we to give ’eb?’ said Abram.

‘Reckon the number of people, then find out the carrying capacity of the long-boat and quarter-boats. See that they are plentifully watered and provisioned. Give ’em a sextant and charts, sails, oars, and rudders ; let them

be wanting in nothing. It may tell for us, Abram. That's all I mean to say—the rest you can do for yourselves.'

Whilst Tom spoke, the prize-fighter's dead-black, fiery eyes were fixed upon Mr. Bates ; his pock-marked face wore its habitual sardonic, leering, self-complacent expression.

'Is it understood,' said he, 'that Bates is to help you to sail this ship?'

'Certainly. I must have help. I've told you I can't stand a twenty-four-hours' watch. I ask for no better sailor to help me than Bates.'

'He was one of the ship's officers, and we'll hold you responsible for his behaviour if you employ him,' said one of the convicts, a tall, thin, gray-haired man, delicate, with something of refinement in his face, speaking with an educated accent.

'Parsons, I can't navigate this ship alone. I suppose you know that,' said Tom, with heat.

'We shall want to feel when we've turned in that we're being honestly steered,' answered the convict.

(Tom afterward told me that this man had been a surgeon in a fair way of practice in a London suburb, and had been sentenced to transportation for life for arson.)

‘What do you know about the sea?’ cried my sweetheart, with the utmost scorn. ‘Abram, I can endure sensible opposition, but this sort of jaw is swinish. My neck’ll fit a halter as well as his,’ he added, pointing to Parsons; ‘but my life is more precious, certainly, for you’d not miss him if he dropped overboard; but let me go, and if this gentleman,’ and here he clapped Bates upon the shoulder, ‘refused to stand by you, and carry you to an agreed part of the world, I’d give you a week to be dismasted, to be pumping for your lives, to be in the utmost extremity. Have you sought your liberty to end as puffed and green carcasses a hundred fathoms deep over the side if the sharks let you plumb that depth?’

‘There’s too buch talk,’ said Barney Abram. ‘Is every bad to be baster? Butler’s the agreed captid. He chooses Bates to help hib. Bates he shall have, ad to prove

that we trust him he shall give directions for getting the boat over and setting the prisoners adrift. Come along, sir, and give us the pleasure of hearing you sign out.'

He passed his giant arm through the poor mate's and walked off with him in the direction of the main-deck. The convicts followed to a man, talking eagerly and tumultuously as they pressed forward in the wake of the two. I said softly, that the fellow at the wheel might not hear me: 'They seem afraid of you, Tom.'

'I am one of them,' he answered, bitterly. 'They are not afraid of me. But the thoughtful amongst them know they are helpless without me, and the other wretches are influenced by the few who can think.'

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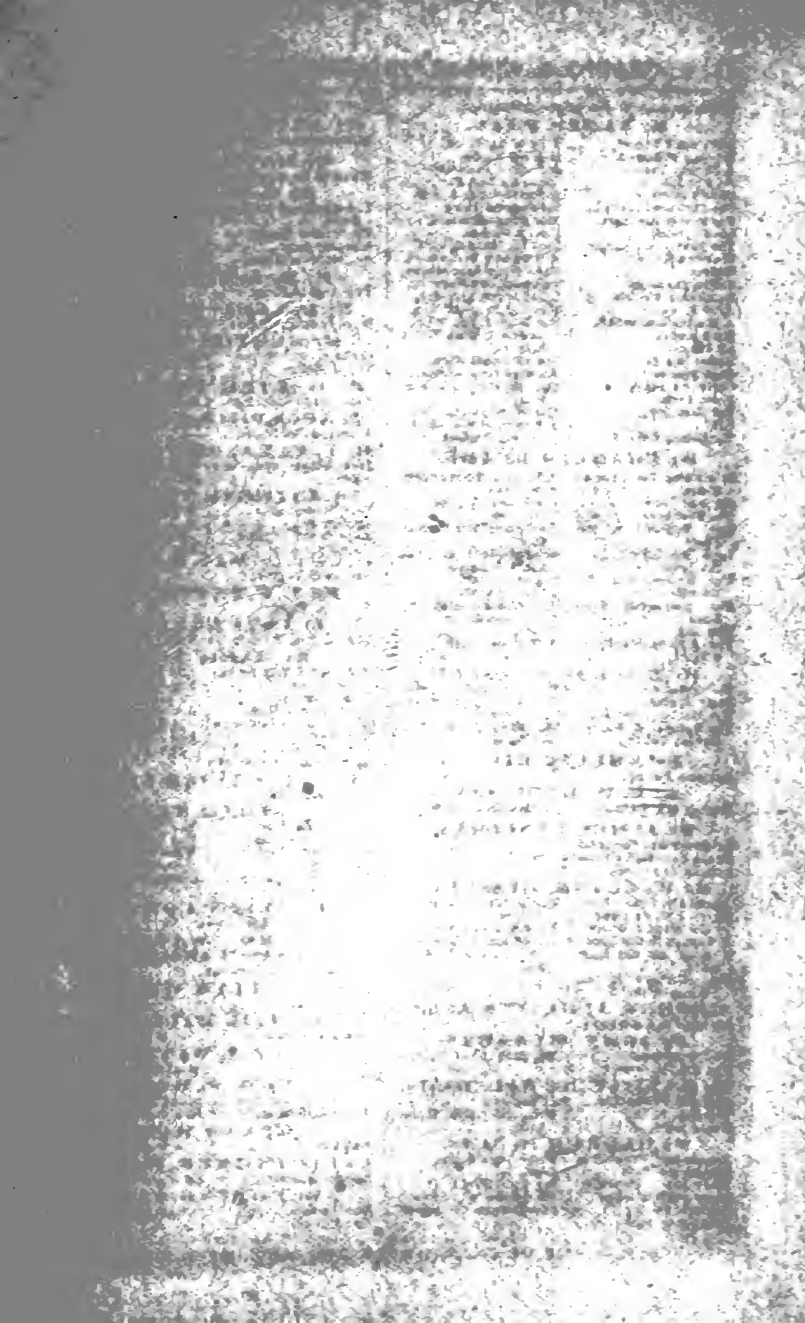
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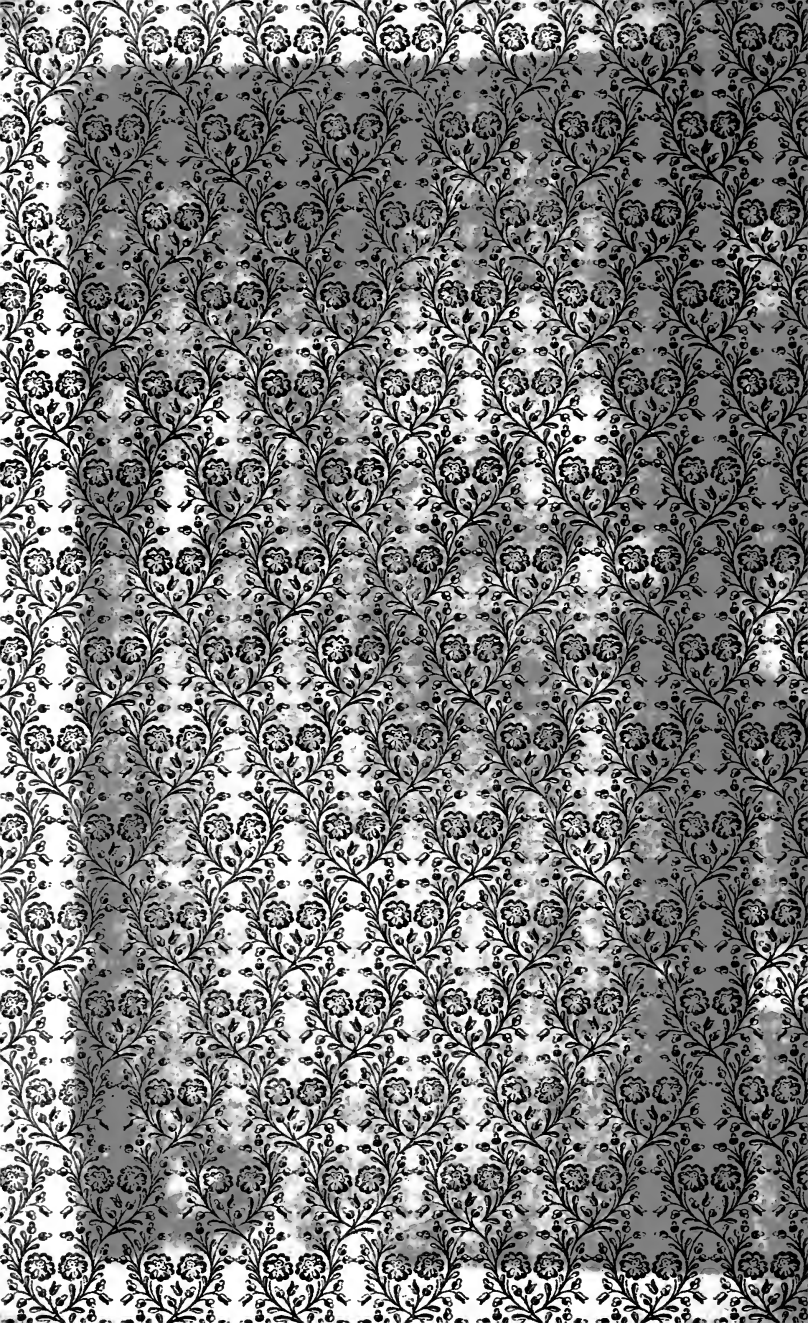
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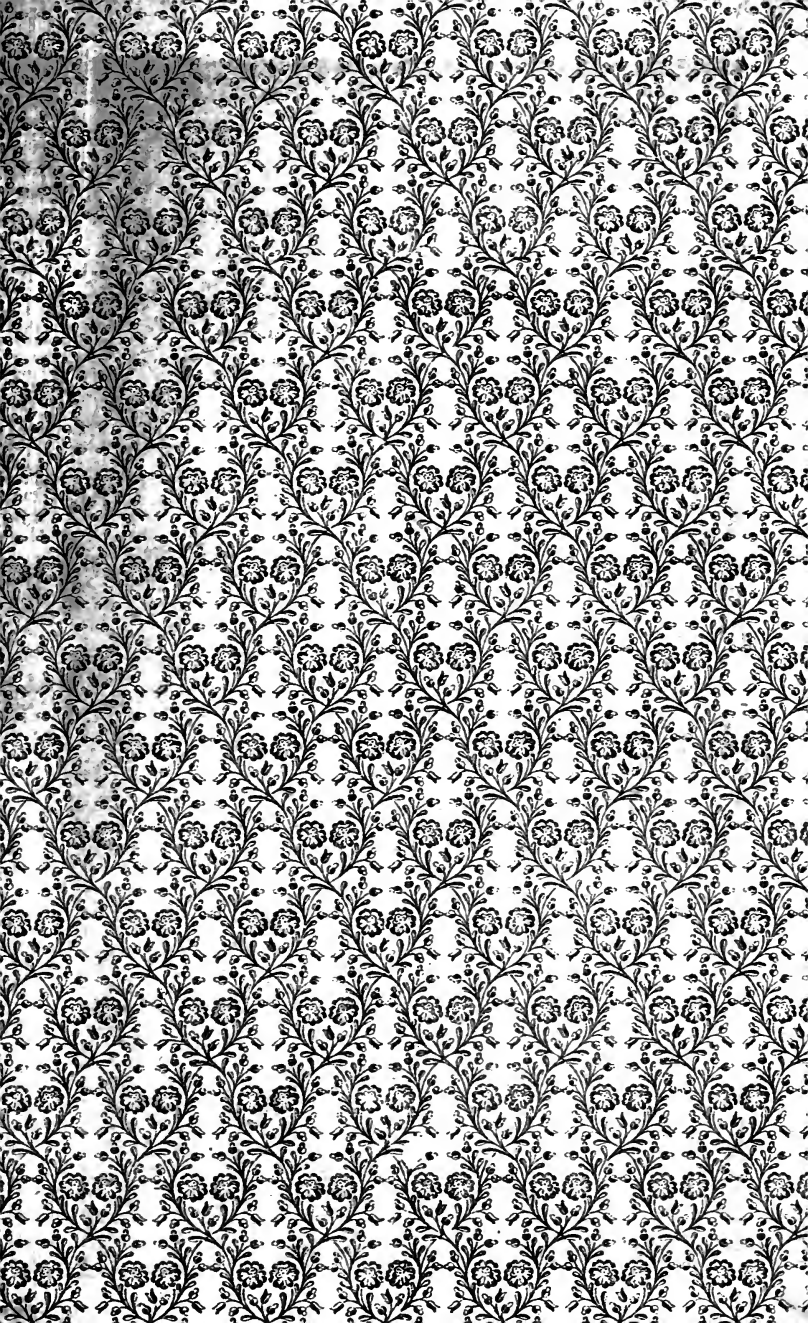
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